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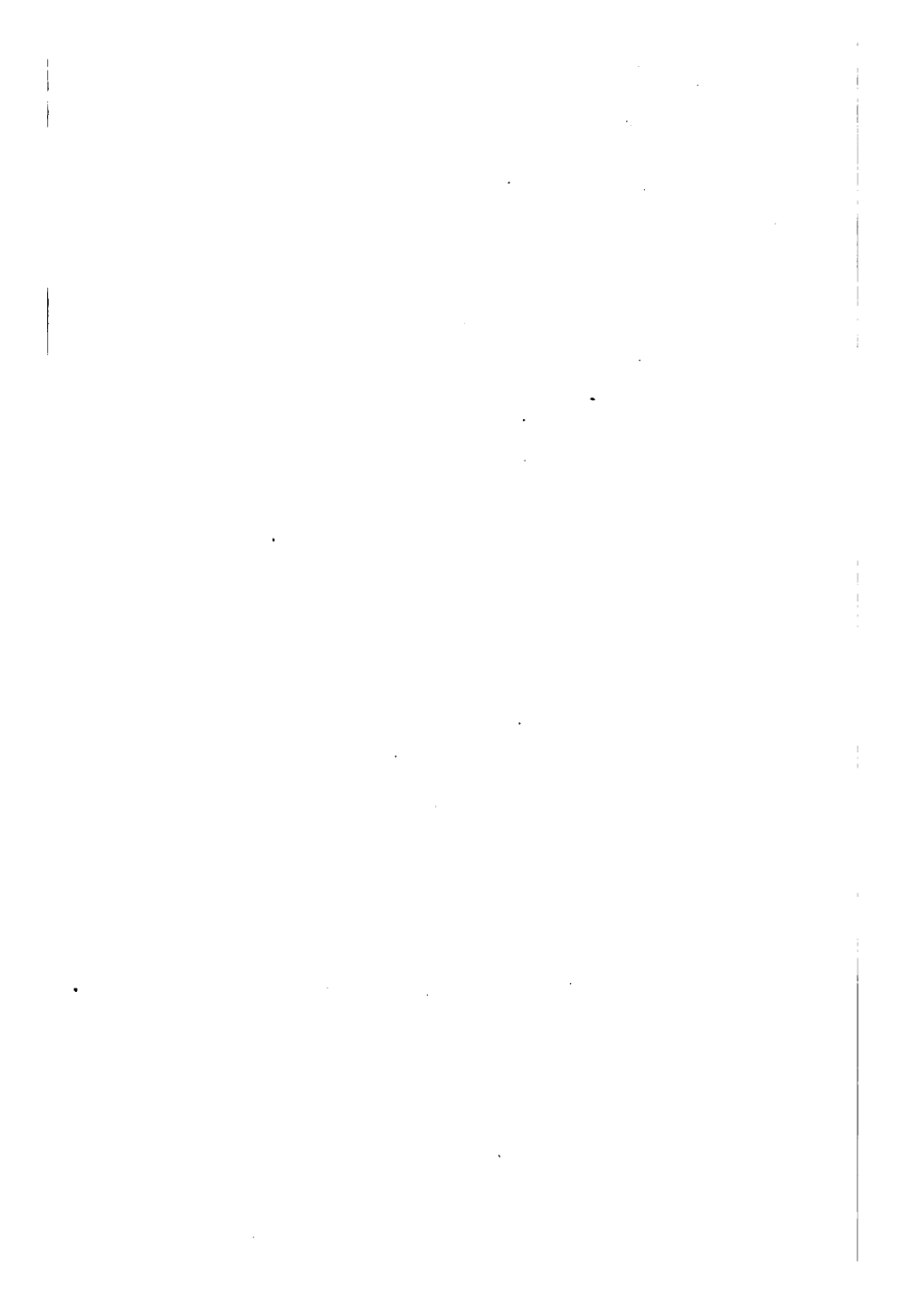
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# D A N D Y:

*A NOVEL.*

BY

JEAN MIDDLEMASS,

AUTHOR OF 'SACKCLOTH AND BROADCLOTH,' 'WILD GEORGIE,' 'SEALED BY  
A KISS,' 'INNOCENCE AT PLAY,' ETC. ETC.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

VOL. I.



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# D A N D Y.



## CHAPTER I.

M E R C Y.



STUFFED Horse for Sale, with Figure of a Lady (wax head and hands), Saddle and Bridle complete. Suitable for a Tailor's Shop Window, Photographers, Saddlers, etcetera.'

Job Jennett read this advertisement over twice, then he put the paper down and thought. Thought deliberately and determinedly, scratching his head the while for at least four seconds. The result of his

meditations was that he got up from a rather rickety arm-chair on which he had been sitting by the fire drinking his matutinal tea in his little back parlour, and went into the front shop.

Job Jennett was a jobbing tailor of aspiring tendencies ; these aspiring tendencies led him to measure his window.

‘ Five feet one. Shouldn’t wonder now if it was to take in that there horse and woman. It ’ud fill up the room a bit ; but what matter, the work as it would bring would soon authoritate the shifting into bigger premises. Why, bless ye, Regent Street and Oxford Street all in one ’ud be nothing to this ’ere small Smith Street, with that there lady in the window. She’d fetch ’em, she would. Many’s the time as I have looked at they lay figures in the swell shops and longed for a bit of wax work of my own. She’d cost a power o’ money though—female folk mostly does ; but there’s summat to fall back on in the savings bank, good luck to it.’

At this period of his soliloquy Mr Job Jennett, having taken a bunch of keys from his

pocket, opened a small old-fashioned bureau which stood in a corner, and pulling out his savings bank book, began to con it over with great attention.

The addition of figures obviously proved most satisfactory, for he chuckled as he returned the book to its usual resting-place, and then proceeded once more to ascertain the exact height and length and breadth of the window.

These practical arrangements being completed, he resumed his breakfast in the back parlour, without, however, sitting down.

Job Jennett was a little man, a very little man indeed, his big ideas and big words being duly considered; he was only five feet four, three inches longer than his own window. In age he was about forty-seven, but he looked more.

‘Struggles,’ he would have told you, ‘had dried up the sap in his constitootion.’

And so they had; that is, close application to work had made him look very white and haggard. His hair was grey, what there was of it, which was not much, and that little set up in a sort of point on the top

of his head, while on his face he wore a short pointed grisly beard, the two combined giving his countenance a peculiarly elongated cadaverous expression. Yet Job Jennett was not without his cheery moments,—all ambitious natures have their gleams of sunshine.

Having drunk his tea and finished a large hunk of bread on which there was scraped a mere modicum of salt butter,—Mr Jennett being a man of frugal habits,—he put on his hat. Then he took down from off a peg his best go-to-meeting coat—till now he had been in his shirt sleeves—and seemed evidently bent on enjoying a little walk.

‘Going out, dad, so early?’

It was apparent that Mr Jennett was a family man, for at this moment the parlour door opened and a girl of about eighteen came in and instantly began to clear away the breakfast things.

Job Jennett showed a little trepidation of manner on hearing himself thus accosted. Could it be that he was afraid of this active young woman, or was he just a little ashamed of the project he had in his head?

Yet she was not his daughter, although she called him 'dad,' and was known about the entire neighbourhood as Mercy Jennett.

Fourteen years ago, when Job was three-and-thirty and Mercy was four, she had walked into the little room down Shoreditch way, where in those days Job lived with his mother (the old mother has gone to her rest and he has risen in the world since then). The child sat down on a little stool by the fire, and they gave her some milk—London sky blue—and asked her name. She told them it was 'Mercy,' she knew no more save that 'Mammy was in Heaven.' Job made inquiries everywhere, but could find no one who laid any claim to the child; the police sent him to the workhouse, the workhouse to the police, and while they were debating and wrangling as to what parish she belonged to, days grew into weeks, and little Mercy had so endeared herself to old Mrs Jennett and her son that they could not find it in their hearts to thrust her from the home, into which chance or Providence had led her to stray.

‘The sup and the bite as is enough for us ’ull do for the gal too,’ Jennett said, and so it proved. They were never without food, and when the old mother died, Mercy being about twelve ‘took to the housekeeping,’ as Job expressed it, and a right thrifty little body she proved—housekeeping in Smith Street not being nearly so nominal as it was in Shoreditch, for in Smith Street Mr Jennett was a landlord as well as having a tailoring business of his own, whereas in Shoreditch he had been only a lodger.

‘A twelve-roomed house, and if you please every room let off,’ as he was won’t to tell his friends, when he did occasionally go into the ‘Hen and Chickens’ to drink a glass of half-and-half on club nights.

But the pride of Job Jennett’s heart was his first-floor lodger, ‘him as has made his rooms so beautiful like you can’t tell ’em from Paradise; and don’t he sing lovely just; and bless ye he gives no trouble though; he has engaged Mercy to wait on him, and gives her a whole sovereign every now and then for the doing of it; he is a

gentleman thorough, though he is a furri-  
neer ; but he can't help that. A Sennoor  
something or other, he never can re-  
member what, so he just calls him Sen-  
noor and has done with it.'

In fact so prolix was Job Jennett on the  
subject of his first-floor lodger, that the  
neighbours regarded the good-looking singer  
who inhabited his drawing-rooms as rather  
a bore.

But to return to the morning in question,  
and Mercy in the act of clearing the break-  
fast table. She is not pretty, in fact she is  
rather plain. Must a girl be pretty to be  
interesting ? We think not ; that is entirely  
a masculine view. An artist would have said  
that she had not one good feature in her face,  
nor had she, but still it was a bright one, with  
a redundancy of colour, two little sparkling,  
beady eyes, and a quantity of glossy jet-  
black hair. Mercy's type was decidedly  
grisette ; whatever her parentage, no one was  
likely to stumble on the idea that it might  
be noble, or what is called even genteel.  
She was a true child of the people, and  
asked and wished for no more exalted title.

She always laughed at Job Jennett whenever he unfolded his ambitious projects to her, as he not unfrequently did, and probably that was the reason of his nervousness now, as he wondered what Mercy would say about the beautiful amazon he had serious thoughts of placing in his shop window.

‘I am going out on a bit of business,’ he said, as he fidgeted about the room, brushed the dust off his coat, took his cotton handkerchief out of his pocket and smoothed his hat. He had put on a tall one, whereas he usually wore a ‘billycock,’ and finally re-tied his shoes, of which the strings as a rule hung about his feet, to Mercy’s no small annoyance.

She meanwhile packed all the breakfast things on to a tray, rolled up the cloth—it was not of the cleanest—and placed it on the top of them, and then, instead of carrying them off downstairs into the back kitchen, which was reserved for Mercy’s culinary manipulations, she stood and looked at Job.

He evidently did not intend to say where he was going ; but he grew more and more



nervous and uncertain in his manner, as he felt that Mercy's little twinkling eyes rested on him. At last he made a sudden dash at the mantel-piece and snatched up his pipe. Even in his 'go-to-meeting' clothes he felt he must retain that piece of consolation about his person.

Having achieved this, he was making for the door when he turned round.

'Good-bye, Mercy. I sha'n't be very long. Keep an eye to the shop, there's a good girl.'

He was gone, and she still stood for several seconds contemplating the unwashed breakfast things. Repose, however, was scarcely one of Mercy's characteristics. If her mind was working, so must be her body. She swept up the hearth and put nearly a scuttleful of coke, which was standing by, on the fire. It was a kitchen range, although the room was a parlour. She went into the shop and dusted the counter, where at this hour Job usually sat working; then she turned over various pieces of tweed and broadcloth which lay in the window, bestowed a moment's attention on one or two

garments which had come in for repairs, set the bell so that if any one opened the shop door she should hear it, and sauntered back to her tray, which she eventually carried down into the basement. Another ten minutes and she reappeared with three flat-irons and a stand ; the coke fire was burning clearly, and she set them up in front of it.

Click went the bell in the front shop. Only a youth for a dozen trouser buttons. Even at this period of his career, Mr Jennett was not above selling such articles of haberdashery as were used in his trade. Mercy served the young man, and then got out an ironing board and a goffering apparatus. Having arranged everything with the most professional precision, she next produced from a basket in the corner a bundle of starched damp clothes of the very finest description, such as it was scarcely probable were worn by any member of the Smith Street household, not even by the Sennoor himself, since they consisted of caps, frills, collars, cuffs, and such like feminine frippery.

All this while, notwithstanding her activity,

there was decidedly a thoughtful expression on Mercy's face. She was bothered. Job Jennett usually informed her where he was going, it was a bad plan doubtless; but he was by nature not a secretive man, nor had he cause to be, and Mercy was his habitual companion. It made it then all the more odd to her that he should have 'dressed hisself' and gone out without a word to-day. Every moment as she ironed away at her well-stiffened collars, her astonishment increased, and surmises came thick and strong. She took a fresh iron from the front of the fire, spat on it, wiped it, rubbed it bright on a bit of scouring paper, set it down on a gallipot turned upside down with a slam that nearly broke the aforesaid gallipot, and exclaimed,—

'It's a woman! I'll stake my reputation as an ironer that it's a woman! Lor', if dad was to marry—after all these years if he was to now!'

The idea seemed to stagger her, for she did not go on with her work, but stood with her hands on her sides, looking round her in a vague sort of way. What she was

thinking of did not come to the surface, probably because it was too deep to find vent in spoken words ; but when at last she took up the iron it was so cold that it stuck to the starched collar and left a smeary mark, which nothing but rewashing would obliterate. In her annoyance over this accident she momentarily forgot the subject which had been exercising her mind for the last half-hour or more.

‘And me that promised those things by four o’clock to-day ; however shall I get them done ?’

It was evident that Mercy, like her adopted father, had a line of business. The thought of a disappointed patroness for a time usurped the place of every other, and Mercy set energetically to work to repair the mischief her dream had occasioned, when ‘click’ once more went the shop bell.

‘Drat it !’ was the utterance below her breath ; but Mercy’s education had taught her never to be uncivil to a customer, so she wiped her damp fingers on the corner of her large white ironing apron, and was just going to open the door which was closed between

her and the front shop, when the trouble was saved her, and a young man in his working clothes, with a paper cap on his head, walked in.

‘Lor’, Jim, whatever brings you here at this time of the day?’

‘Is the governor in?’

‘No, he ain’t; and what’s more, I don’t know where he’s gone. It’s queer, ain’t it?’

‘What, that he should be out, or that you shouldn’t know where he’s gone?’

‘Well, both, and most of all that you should be away from work at this hour. Why, it’s half-past ten by that there clock on the chimney-piece, and it’s pretty right too.’

‘What should you say if I wasn’t to go back to work no more?’

‘Jim!’

Such a thing as not working, for a member of her class, whether male or female, was more than a delinquency in Mercy’s eyes,—it was a sin. The young man, however, only laughed at the surprise and disapprobation which was depicted on her face.

'Have you had a fortin' left you, or whatever is it?' she asked.

'Well, 'tain't a fortin'—that is what swells means by a fortin'—but it's a bit of money. Luck, ain't it, Mercy, for I've always said as I warn't born to work.'

'And are you going to do nothing, nothing but walk about London in them clothes, with your hands in your pockets?' she inquired indignantly.

'In these clothes, no! That's just what I want the governor for, to make me a suit of clothes—sporting kind of cut, don't you know?'

'However much money have you got, Jim, that you're going to flash it?'

'Five or six hundred, ain't sure it mayn't be seven.'

'Is that all?'

'All, my girl! Whatever do you mean by all?'

'Well, I don't mean to say as it ain't a neat little sum to fall back on on a rainy day; but it ain't enough to make you give up your situation, Jim, and you a clever mechanic, too.'

‘What! do carpentering work from six in the morning till six at night, and me worth all that money in the bank! You must be out of your mind, Mercy, to suppose it. I’ll sell my tools this very day as ever is.’

Mercy heaved a deep sigh.

‘You’ll come to the workus, Jim.’

‘The workus! That’s a way to talk to a chap just when he’s *elated* with his bit of luck and has come to ask you to share it. We’ll take a public, my girl, and be as jolly as—’

‘Never!’ she cried emphatically; ‘no public for me. I’ve seen enough of drunkenness all about these parts. I don’t intend never to help to make it. If you’re going into the public line, Jim, you’ll have to find another sweetheart.’

‘And that’s what you call loving a fellow, Mercy? You ain’t got no heart.’

Mercy’s eyes filled with tears at the accusation. The truth was she possessed a very loving nature. Not that she was by any means a promiscuous lover; but she was very devoted, very loyal, and staunch when once she did love.

All the deep affection of her true heart was divided between her adopted father and Jim Burritt, with whom she had been keeping company for the last two years.

They frequently had their little spars, but always made them up again, only to be more affectionate than ever ; but this money division seemed likely to prove more serious than any of its predecessors. Jim took no notice of the tearful eyes, but said rather brutally,—

‘ You like to see a fellow slaving his life away ; working to keep you by the sweat of his brow—that makes you happy. You’re no better than the rest of the women—you all want sacrifice. If a chap can give you money without a bother ’taint worth having ; but let him be pinched and hard worked and druv as though he was a convict, then you take the coin and welcome.’

‘ I can keep myself, and don’t want no man to work for me,’ said Mercy proudly.

‘ Never said you couldn’t ; but why should you when I loves you, and there’s close on seven hundred pounds to hand.’

‘ Seven hundred pounds ’ud soon go, and I don’t want no publics,’ said Mercy.



‘Then you would rather give me up than be my wife if I go into the public line?’

‘I don’t altogether say that, Jim, for I hope you’ll give in when you know how much I object. Let’s stick to our businesses, else what was the good of learning them? You to your carpentering, me to my ironing. We’d be rich in our old age with that bit of capital to help us along.’

‘I won’t, not even to please you. I’m sick of carpentering; there,’ and he took off his paper cap and threw it on the fire.

Mercy lifted the cold iron from the gallipot and set it to warm; but two big tears fell on it before she put it out of her hand. How dared Jim Burritt say that Mercy did not love him, unless it was because he knew full well how little he deserved her love? He was a good-looking, fair-haired young fellow of about five-and-twenty, and a first-rate workman when he chose to work, which was, however, only by fits and starts, hence the frequent dissension that arose between him and Mercy. She always hoped, however, that her influence and perhaps matrimony would make

him steadier: he was too respectable, too good-hearted to let his family want.

The knowledge then that he had become possessed, by some means, of seven hundred pounds was no good hearing to Mercy—in fact it brought with it such a presentiment of evil that she had not even taken the trouble to inquire whence he had obtained it. An omission to which he called her attention pretty severely just as the last piece of tinder, into which his paper cap had been reduced, was flying up the chimney.

‘I never thought but what you came by it honestly,’ she answered. ‘The rest was mere curiosity. I ain’t had time to be curious yet.’

‘Well, I’m blest if you ain’t a disheartening wench. Leave off that there ironing, can’t you, and enter into a chap’s plans.’

For Mercy had taken up a hot iron and was once more at work at her collars.

‘I can listen and talk quite as well when I’m busy. Her ladyship is in a hurry for these things. She’s going out of town.’

‘Blow her ladyship! You ain’t going to work to dress up swells like her when you’re my wife.’

‘We’ll see about that later on,’ observed Mercy very quietly. ‘In the meantime it’s my duty to help dad. Why, if we was all such fine folk as you, Jim, people would have no clothes to wear and no houses to live in. Now tell me, boy, how did you get the money? Dad will be surprised when he hears about it.’

Making an effort, she was trying to shake away her presentiment and to talk cheerily of his projects ; she did not, however, obey him by leaving off her ironing.

‘Well, you see my old uncle as was in the haberdashery line is dead, and has left me his heir,’ explained Jim, who was quite good-tempered again, now that he could talk of his wealth.

‘He hadn’t retired,’ said Mercy ; ‘why don’t you buckle to at his business.’

‘Me sell bits of tape and ha’penny worths of pins across a counter to dirty drabs. Don’t you know me better than that?’

Alas ! she did know him better, and she sighed.

‘Drabs’ money is as good as ladies’ if it makes hundreds,’ she answered sententiously.

‘But look at the time they ha’penny worths takes up, and what far better things one might be doing meanwhile.’

‘Lor’!’ and Mercy’s eyes opened very wide and twinkled very brightly, ‘whatever did he mean; not pots of beer surely?’

‘Since you object to a public, where we should make money freely, I shall see if I can’t get some genteel gentlemanly occupation.’

Mercy looked at him for a minute, then she burst out laughing.

‘My heart, Jim, the money’s cracked your skull. You a gentleman and me a lady, I suppose. We shall want a carriage to ride in next.’

‘And why not if we can afford to pay for it.’

‘Well, for my part, I ain’t got no wish to have that as I wasn’t born to. It wouldn’t make me no happier, not yet so happy.’

Jim took up the goffering apparatus and threw it noisily on the floor.

‘Whatever have you done that for?’ cried Mercy, looking up from her collar.

The expression of Jim's face half-frightened her, it was so violent. She had often seen him angry before, but for the first time it dawned upon her that he could be brutal in his passion.

But there being nothing of the vapourish miss about Mercy, she did not flinch, but said very positively,—

‘I think you had better go away now, Jim, and leave me to finish my work. You can come back when you know how to behave yourself.’

Her calmness quelled the rage which might otherwise have passed all bounds ; but he did not speak, only stood looking at her in a sheepish sort of half-stupid way.

She, meantime, went on ironing. She would not let him see how much his behaviour had moved her. A loud peal roused them both—not the shop bell this time.

‘It is the Sennoor,’ said Mercy, as though answering Jim's questioning look.

If he had not been a little bit ashamed of himself at that moment, he probably would have told her that he would not have her

waiting on 'Sennoors;' but Mercy gave him no time to recover himself. She put her iron in front of the fire and ran off, leaving Jim to go away or stay where he was, as it pleased him.





## CHAPTER II.

### THE ITALIAN TENOR.

**S**IGNOR GUISEPPE BELSO-SPIRO, called by the Jennetts the 'Sennoor,' did not take his meals at home, being *abonné* at Abbrugnidos, the small but crowded Italian *trattoria* in Felix Street, where for the modest sum of five pounds monthly he was supplied with two repasts per day, including a mezzo of his native wine. If, owing to the hospitality of his acquaintances or any other cause, he happened to be an absentee, that went to the profit of his friend the *trattore*. Thus he did not frequently ring his bell o' mornings; a subdued slam of the house door — musicians have usually a respect for their own and other people's eardrums,

—being the signal that his rooms were vacated.

This occurred with very slight variation at eleven o'clock, or some two hours after his hot water and hotter half cup of black coffee had been deposited, with a modest tap, outside his bedroom door by Mercy.

Much of the interval was devoted to singing and playing and also to writing music, for the signor was a virtuoso of more than respectable gifts, and he made money in three branches of his art. He was a charming drawing-room singer, though without voice enough for opera or concert room; a teacher of singing in rapidly increasing practice, and the composer of many published songs and of two unpublished operas.

He is a young man, now barely thirty, scarce five feet six in height, and with considerably more than a tendency to *embonpoint*. But what is wanting in figure is greatly compensated for by his handsome, even noble head. The full olive face is redeemed from sensuality by the undeniable intellect of a pair of flashing black eyes. Luxuriant curly



hair of the same hue is evidently the object of much time and care, while a moustache and imperial, some shades lighter, appear to be all the hirsute decorations intended by nature for his countenance, because the shaving of the place where whiskers come to other men, and all the region beneath the chin, is with him almost a work of supererogation.

Thus what we may call the landscape gardening of the face, a matter of such endless solicitude and experiment with a large portion of our male coquettes, is with Bel-sospino narrowed to the one, two, three or nothing. In temperament he is sanguine, buoyant, even joyous, and takes his corpulency, as he does all the other ills of life, with supreme good humour ; all he stipulates for in the way of comfort being that he may be permitted to talk of these to his heart's content, and this he always does in a facetious key. He has now been four years in England, and though he has really worked hard at the language, his progress has been modest in the extreme. French, acquired almost entirely in Rome, he speaks with the purest Italian accent.

'*Avez vous vou,*' he said the other night to a noble and solemn Englishman, whose acquaintance he had just made at a party. '*Avez vous vou jamais oun voix si petite comme la mienne?*' here he illustrated its smallness by measuring off the eighth of an inch of his left little finger. '*No! n'est ce pas? bien j'ai dite l'autre jour à l'ambassade Italien c'est pas toujours qu'il sorte d'oun tonneau les tonnères; et tout le monde a beaucoup ri,*' and here he went off into convulsions at his own joke, whereupon the stately peer, not the least understanding the point, but anxious to be civil and dreaming of no danger, trotted out his little thoroughbred apology for a laugh. Poor man! he had scarcely done so when he was forced to fly for his life, and never stopped till he reached the smoking-room of his club, where, to use his own words, he complained that 'the d—d little singing fellow began to hug me in the middle of the room.' And yet with this exception of his being somewhat too demonstratively and indiscriminately affectionate, and his natural superabundance of gesture, it would have been difficult to pick

a hole in Belsospiro's manners. You might have found plenty of professors, French, English, or German, some of whom would show all his ease and some his faultless tact in keeping his place as an *artiste*; but we doubt if any but an Italian ever unites the two qualities so thoroughly and so gracefully. Even the stolid earl whom he so frightened never looked upon the assault as he would have done had his aggressor been a British subject, but considered it as one of the lingering barbarisms of the land of Malaria and papal infallibility. London being the Eldorado of all foreign votaries of Apollo, from Rubini's to organ boys, our '*Maestro*' had only waited to repair thither until he found himself the master of some thirty pounds in money and two good suits of clothes. How long it takes for an aspirant to accumulate so large a sum in the land of song, '*and out of Italians*,'—for the stranger in Rome goes for lessons only to some celebrity, about two of whom monopolise all the fashionable aspirants in the vocal art who winter in the eternal city,—those only know who have tried it. But our friend

was lucky in bringing with him three powerful letters. One from an old Roman princess to the wife of the Italian minister in London, another from his Roman publishers to their branch house here, and a third to an English lady of undeniable position from her brother, who had not only joined the Church of Rome, but had achieved very high ecclesiastical honours therein, and become a fixture at the Vatican. All foreigners are as a rule thrifty, the *jeunes crévés* who fling their money about at the Café Anglais and the Maison Dorée being among the few notable exceptions, and these lend singular force to the conventional French expression '*Il a tout mangé*,' always used as an equivalent to our 'He has run through everything.'

With Belsospiro on his arrival it was a sheer necessity, if he did not want to risk finding himself a beggar before he should gain a footing, to live with the strictest frugality, and as is very common with his countrymen in London, he continued his patronage of the landlord and restaurant of his early days, now that fortune had put better things in his power. At first he had

not indeed spent nearly his present monthly sum upon his inner man ; his morning meal had then little of the *fourchette* about it, and if truth must be told, there were days when things looked bad on which an eightpenny help of *spaggetti a la Milanese* had been made to do duty for a dinner. But Arrigo Abbrugnido's little establishment was nothing if not elastic, and it was the pride of its *padrone* that he could adequately minister both to rich and poor. Besides an Italian, to be happy, can only habitually feed at one of his national victuallers ; however, like the Frenchman, he may occasionally stoop to our barbarous delicacies of—say a Norfolk turkey and sausages, a beef-steak and oyster dumpling, and such like benighted fare. At the snug little restaurant in Felix Street there was thus one rare advantage, you could hardly starve there as long as a shilling a day was forthcoming, and yet you might easily expend full twenty times that amount—your pocket and conscience being agreeable—and get every penny of your money's worth.

It was not very long, however, before our

young professor began to find the beautiful heavy English sovereigns dropping slowly in.

As you could not fail to learn by the high piping pitch of his speaking-organ, Belso-spiro's singing voice, such as it was, was of the tenor order ; the lightest, and, alas ! the thinnest of tenors ; and yet such was his mastery over the mystic resources of the throat, that in concerted music, if a contralto, baritone, nay, even a *basso profundo*, happened to be missing, it was marvellous to hear how the little man would manufacture the requisite voice and produce the notes, from no one knew where, and give the score with such point and effect, that the absentee was scarcely to be regretted ; then he played too, admirably at sight, everything that was set before him, and as to operatic music, he positively seemed to know everything by heart. Airs, words, accompaniments, he was letter perfect in all, and when any one expressed astonishment, he would remark simply that he had been *repetitore* at a minor theatre for six years by the time he was five-and-twenty. This accounted no doubt for his utter indifference as to

keys ; both with new music before him or when accompanying from memory it appeared exactly the same to him if asked for four sharps or six flats, and he had worked so hard at the mechanical part of his art when a boy, that though of late years he never dreamt of practising, he could run a scale against many a professional pianist. When singing on his own account before anything of a party, our Maestro never went beyond a modest romanza of his own composition, or some bewitching national ballad or *arietta*, but if you got him *en petit comité*, a few choice spirits *fanatiche per la musica*, assembled, say round a piano in some quiet boudoir, the modest deliverer of graceful trifles would swell into the operatic *primo tenore assoluto*, and pour forth *cavatina* and *bravura* with an enthusiasm and a *brio* which bade fair for the nonce to make his listeners forget they had not before them a Dupréz or a Guigliani. Nay, on a little compulsion he would go through a whole act of the Favorita, Ernani, Aïda or the Puritani, singing the prima donna's and all the other parts, as in turn each became prominent in the sweet burden

of song, making on the whole a very orchestra of the little Erard beneath his lissome fingers.

With the quickness and adaptability of his race, he had rapidly seized the spirit of English life, and jumped to countless conclusions thereupon, all delightfully piquant either in thought or expression, and very few of them devoid of at least a fair element of truth.

Thus the little virtuoso soon discovered how utterly indifferent a matter it was both to his grand friends and his prospects whether he dwelt in St James' or St Giles'. Provided he always arrived well dressed, no one troubled their head as to his being his own valet or not, nor whether he had come to the door in a brougham, a cab, or on his own womanish little feet, so long as his boots were faultless and undefiled by mud.

'Ay fas send,' he would say, 'in eash contré de men's different, but de women ol same. A chairming ledde have no contree, or elser—to say better—she seeme evvry verre my compatriotte. Mi sembra un' Italiana,' for it was a trick of the signor's, after hammer-



ing through an English or French sentence, to console himself with a word or two of his vernacular to take the taste away, as it were. It may be as well, once for all, to mention that as Guiseppe Belsospiro is likely to play a somewhat conspicuous part in this veracious history,—and as a constant imitation of that worthy's phraseology and pronunciation would probably soon prove wearisome on paper, we shall for the future generally leave both to the imagination of the reader.

When Mercy went up to the drawing-room after she left Jim Burritt, she found the singer sitting over the fire shivering.

He asked her in his peculiar lingo, which she was beginning after a fashion to understand, if he could have something to eat, as the morning was cold and he felt unwell and disinclined to go out.

'Oh!' she said after a second or two, during which she had stood with her head on one side, contemplating him curiously, 'you want some breakfast? All right, you shall have it directly. You can always have breakfast here if you like.'

Guiseppe shrugged his shoulders and gave a little shudder. English fare as a rule was scarcely to his liking, but he said nothing, since at the present moment he was sadly in want of Mercy's culinary assistance, the fact being that he was more out of luck with life than really ill. He had received a letter which had annoyed him; up to the present moment he had spent all the 'morning reading it. His music, his other business transactions, all had given place to this evidently important document, till the little man had succeeded in making himself quite ill. So he craved Mercy's assistance, and after drinking something hot, he hoped to be able to face the elements and go on his usual round of lessons.





### CHAPTER III.

#### NOT MARRY JIM!



MERCY hurried herself as much as she possibly could over the preparation of Signor Guiseppe's breakfast, for two very obvious reasons.

In the first place, perhaps she wanted to get back to Jim; in the second, she was really anxious to finish the ironing she had undertaken. A good half-hour, however, passed before she was quite free, and had left the singer to enjoy the nice strong tea with the toast, fresh butter and egg she had taken up to him. For these last two delicacies she had sent a little boy who lived with his mother in the front kitchen, and who often went on errands for Mercy. When she returned to the back parlour Jim was gone

that she was disappointed, the expression of her face left little doubt.

‘He might have waited,’ she half muttered; ‘he’s got nothing to do, and he knew I was busy. Oh me, whatever will I make with Jim? It’s a gone pity that I care about him. However, it’s no good wasting my time a-thinking about him just now, he’ll come back safe enough when he’s out of his sulks. Drat these irons!’ for the fire had got low and they were nearly cold. She put on some more coke.

‘All that money too, as he has got. I’m sorry it won’t bring him no good, and these things as are not half done, and her ladyship as is going out of town to-morrow.’

The confusion of ideas that was evidently at its height in Mercy’s mind was making her quite incoherent. She worked on steadily for a while, then her eye fell on the clock.

‘Dad’s dinner! I must see about that now,’ and so she pushed the ironing board on one side, laid a little table for two in the corner by the fire, and finally disappeared once more into the regions below.

While she was still downstairs, Job Jennett

came in, hung his hat and coat up on the peg, and as though he had not had sufficient exercise out-of-doors, began to walk up and down through the shop and room from window to window, his hands in his trousers' pockets jingling his keys and half-pence. From his appearance it were difficult to determine whether his expedition had been successful or the reverse; only that after a few turns he once more measured the front window, whistling the while. After which he called for Mercy.

'Where the devil is the girl? It's getting blessed late and I want my dinner.'

Mercy at this moment came up the stairs with a dish of steaming hash, fragrant with onions, and they sat down together.

Job vouchsafed no particulars about his recent outing, and Mercy asked no questions, not, however, because the subject did not exercise her mind. After a while she said,—

'Jim Burritt's been here this morning; he's had a hundred or two left him by his uncle, and he's given up work.'

Jennett left off eating, and with his knife

and fork clutched in his hands, his fists on the table, he sat and looked at her.

‘I thought as much,’ he said at last; ‘that boy won’t come to no good.’

‘Oh, dad, don’t say so. Money ought to be a benefit to him.’

‘Money or no money, don’t you marry him, lass, else you’ll rue the day.’

‘Not marry Jim?’

With all his faults, and no one knew them better than Mercy did, it had never occurred to her that she should not marry him.

‘Jim and you has been on my mind this long time,’ continued Mr Jennett, going on with his dinner. ‘I don’t say altogether as there ain’t some pleasantness about the fellow, but he aren’t got no ballast—won’t never stick to nothin’.’

‘He’s young,’ pleaded Mercy against her better judgment. ‘He’ll settle down when he’s a bit older.’

‘Never, girl,’ cried Job, laying down the handle of his knife on the table with a bang, ‘never! He ain’t got it in him. You mark my words, the woman as marries Jim Burritt ’ull die in the workus, and God grant that it

may not be my girl. Look you here, lass, stick to yer old dad, he's got a stroke o' luck too, which will turn out better for you than Jim's hundreds. That's what I've been out perambulating the streets about this morning.'

'Then you ain't going to be married, dad?'

'Me?' and the little tailor nearly screamed in his astonishment at the question. 'Me? Whatever made you think of such a thing?'

'I don't know, dad; but when you went out this morning, without uttering a word, I thought as how it were likely.'

'That I'd gone courting? bless the gal, her head's turned with her own sweetheartin'. Courting, me, indeed! My business is my sweetheart. I ain't like Jim Burritt, I don't want no women folk except—that is a pictur' or so, by way of my business and—and—well and you.'

'Jim Burritt only wants me,' answered Mercy, laughing.

'May be, may be, but he won't treat you well when he's got you. Look you here, gal, you give up that chap.'

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‘I can’t,’ said Mercy very simply, the tears rising with a sudden rush into her eyes. ‘I don’t love nobody in the whole world but Jim Burritt and you.’

Mr Jennett gave a little groan. He would have sacrificed everything he possessed on earth to see Mercy happy; but if she had set her heart on Jim, he doubted if happiness would ever be for her.

‘I don’t know what’s to be done—leastwise you don’t reckon to get married now.’

‘Oh no, not for ever so long—perhaps years. Jim must put that bit of money of his in a trade first.’

‘That’s right—then we need not talk of it just now, but let us get back to work.’

Job had to make up for the morning hours that he had wasted, added to which he had every belief that Jim would so disport himself, especially since he had come into some money, as would render his marriage with Mercy totally impossible.

‘It ’ud make the girl a bit love-sick for a while,’ he decided, as he cut out the sleeves of a coat; ‘but she’d get over it—young things mostly do; anyhow it ’ud be better than



marrying a ne'er-do-weel like Jim ; besides, hadn't he opened out a new branch in his business that very morning, and wasn't it all for Mercy ? That 'ud console her when she saw the money coming in.'

By which soliloquy it may be decided that Mr Job Jennett knew nothing about the state of Mercy's feelings, or what she was likely to do in the future.

During the afternoon they both worked away very silently ; both their heads and hearts were full, too full for them to talk across the rooms on other subjects, as they not unfrequently did when at their work.

Guiseppe Belsospiro had gone out. Job Jennett, from his elevated position on the counter, had watched him with a sort of loving, proud expression on his face as he walked down the street in his big fur-lined coat with its sable collar and cuffs.

To make such a coat as that Job Jennett felt would intoxicate him with delight, if only the Sennoor, but—well, there was no knowing what might happen when—

It was getting dusk. Mercy had taken Job his afternoon cup of tea into the shop

so as not to interrupt his work, after which, having quite finished her ironing and put the things into a basket, she dressed herself in a dark red merino frock, tied on a little prim-looking bonnet she always wore, said she was going to her ladyship's, and started off. She half expected a scolding from the maid for being so late, but she trusted it would not be a very dreadful one.

Lady George Heriot, Mercy's patroness, lived in Chapel Street, Park Lane. Mercy went bravely down the area, and being a favourite with the uppér servants, was told to go into the housekeeper's room, where they were at tea. Sitting with them were two children, a boy and girl, both about four years old. The boy Mercy at once recognised as the child of the house, having tea, as he sometimes did for a treat, in the housekeeper's room ; the little girl, however, she had never seen before. Master Andrew, usually called Dandy, at once held out his jam-besmeared hand to Mercy. They were old friends, and Mercy kissed him heartily ; then little Bessy put up her jammy face to be kissed too, and Mercy was told that she

was Master Dandy's foster sister, who had come there on a visit to her mother, who still remained in Lady George's service as nurse.

For nearly an hour Mercy romped with the children and talked to the servants ; then she put her bonnet on again, which they had made her take off, and prepared to go back to Smith Street, which was not very far, being on the north side of Oxford Street, not five minutes' walk from the Circus. The maid gave her a bundle of laces and told her to bring them in a fortnight, by which time her ladyship would have returned from a visit which she was going to pay in the country.

Mercy said 'good-bye,' kissed Master Dandy for the last time, and ran up the area steps very swiftly, so swiftly in fact that from the speed at which she was going she nearly fell into the arms of a man who was standing on the pavement just by the gate.

He muttered an imprecation below his breath.

Mercy said, 'I beg your pardon, sir,' and went on, but in the meantime they had

looked at each other keenly, and each would have sworn to the other's features wherever they had seen them again.

The man did not think any farther about the girl, but remained standing by the lamp-post, as though waiting or watching for some one. Mercy, however, like most women, had more or less of an imaginative vein. When she proceeded a few steps she looked round. 'Yes, he was still there. Which-ever of them maids was he after? He was a gentleman, too.'

Presently the hall door opened, and Guiseppe Belsospiro was shown out by the butler.

'The Sennoor!' exclaimed Mercy. 'Well, I never knowed before as he was acquainted with her ladyship.'

But Signor Guiseppe did not pass her; he went the other way. His appearance, however, had disturbed the stranger, for he sauntered up the street after him, and Mercy, thinking he was quite gone, went on. If she had had a little patience she would have seen that he speedily returned to the lamp-post. In fact, if it had occurred to Mercy

to watch him, much that in the future was dark and inexplicable would have been made clear—but then these pages would never have been written.

She was anxious to get home, so she set off once more at a brisk pace, not even seeing Jim Burritt, who was standing at the corner of South Audley Street, and who, perhaps, not altogether wanting to be seen by Mercy at that moment, did not think fit to stop her.

Strange how in life important issues hang on threads.

It was quite seven by the time Mercy reached Smith Street.

Number 15. Yes, that was her home, but whatever had happened? Was the house on fire?

The whole of the lower part of the house seemed to be in a blaze of light. A crowd, composed of little boys, two or three idle men, and half-a-dozen slatternly women, such as can be called together at pleasure by the smallest coincidence in any back London street, was standing in front of the window. Mercy pushed her way through it, deter-

mined to know the worst at once, whatever it might be.

‘Lor!’

There was Job Jennett’s piece of waxwork, a lady dressed in a habit, quite as large as life, sitting on a full-sized horse.

For a moment Mercy thought she had suddenly gone mad and mistaken the street ; but no, there was the board,

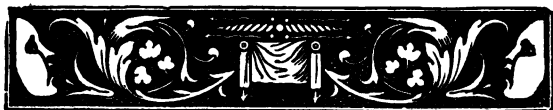
JO B J E N N E T T, T A I L O R,  
R E P A I R S N E A T L Y E X E C U T E D.

as large as ever, lying at the horse’s feet. She pushed open the shop door and went in. The little man was off work; he was too excited to settle down. Having lighted the gas and every candle he could find about the place, he was walking up and down, waiting impatiently for Mercy’s return.

He was disappointed. It was not delight that was depicted on her face, it was wonder and annoyance. The sight of that woman on horseback did not unfold a vista of riches in the future to Mercy as it did to Job. She had heard jeers and mockings

at Jennett's folly from the crowd assembled outside. That her dad should be a laughing stock was more than Mercy could bear, added to the several worries which had been tormenting her all through the day, it served to fill the cup of annoyance to overflowing. She sat down in the back parlour and burst into a flood of tears.





## CHAPTER IV.

### GENTEEL POVERTY.

**T**HE Armfields were poor, but they were well-born, and they made a desperate struggle to keep up a respectable appearance, at least Mrs Armfield and her daughter Venetia did ; Basil, the only son and brother, had been so accustomed to be spoiled and worshipped all his life, that he accepted the position into which his womankind had managed to thrust him without giving himself any very great thought about the matter. His father died when he was a baby, so he had all his life been more or less under petticoat government, especially as his sister, who was four years older than himself, always looked after him and gave in to him as if she had no



object in life except to pamper this good-looking Basil. Yes, she had one other passion—music ; but then Basil loved the art almost as much as she did, so they met on common ground.

After years of severe and almost unparalleled struggles on the part of his mother and sister, during which Basil was receiving a thoroughly good scholarly education, Mrs Armfield at last found herself in what she was pleased to call a haven of rest,—that is, in possession of a small house in a semi-genteel if not aristocratic street at the back of Portland Place, Venetia being at this time in her thirtieth year, Basil in his twenty-sixth, and holding no less enviable a position than that of a clerkship in a Government office.

‘Being,’ as his mother proudly observed when talking affairs over with particular cronies, and patting herself on the back for her cleverness in having obtained it for him, ‘being quite the calling of a gentleman, if not altogether as lucrative as might have been hoped, but then he must make a rich marriage,’ that oasis in the desert of poverty to which all paupers look forward. Ever

since he had passed his examination and been duly installed in Whitehall, she and Venetia had gone on planning and scraping and managing, that he might have a comfortable home when he chose to invite his friends, and always some gold in his pocket when he went to return their visits.

Basil Armfield was neither better nor worse than the other young men with whom he associated. He had his vices, but they were kept in subjection by a keen sense of decency; the most flagrant sin that was permitted to be patent to the every-day public being that of selfishness. But then, as people were wont to observe, Mrs Armfield and Venetia had themselves in a great measure to thank for it. Invariably pushed forward by his family to go into the very best society he could attain, he naturally got through a good deal of money; but they never grudged it, pinching and screwing themselves in order to give him everything he wanted.

For some reason it had never occurred to Mrs Armfield to try and make a rich marriage for Venetia, who was by no means an ill-looking young woman, and who carried

her thirty years so gracefully, that no one gave her the credit for being Basil's senior. Venetia Armfield was fair haired and white and small, possessing all the attributes for holding youth captive for many years, only to change at last all on a sudden into wizen, wrinkled old age. But that dreary period, as far as 'Venice,'—so her brother called her—was concerned, was far in the future. She was still a mere girl in appearance and in heart, for the depths within by means of which the girl is suddenly changed into a woman had never yet been stirred.

Poor Venetia's had been a very prosaic existence; she had only been to one dance in her life, dwelling in a state of monotonous drudgery, to which girls of the present day are little prone; as for finery, she thought herself very well off if she had one tidy frock.

When Basil grew up and was launched on his public career this evil was, however, to a great extent remedied, for he clamoured so loudly over the fact that his sister was not dressed like the other young ladies at the houses where he visited, that an extra amount of pressure was put on the exchequer in order

to buy some cheap dress fabrics, and an even greater amount of pressure on poor Venetia's already overtaxed energies in order to make them up into pretty fashionable garments, so that when Basil's friends came in for a musical evening his sister's appearance might not put him to the blush.

Of course the Armfields did not venture to invite Basil's aristocratic and well placed acquaintances to Cobbold Place, that is, not the feminine portion of them ; thus Venetia's new circle of friends consisted chiefly of men, very young men belonging to the golden youth, interspersed by not a few beings from the border land of that charmed country yclept Bohemia in which Basil and his sister both loved to idle, in spite of Mrs Armfield's occasional but tolerably strongly expressed disapproval.

Naturally, Basil and Venetia's Bohemians were musicians, and among the number was included no less an individual than Signor Guiseppe Belsospiro ; in fact he was quite their show man, always quoted to draw whenever Basil wished to entice a fresh swell to the pleasant little reunion in Cobbold Place.

And that they were very pleasant there is little doubt—what happy admixture of genius and birth can prove otherwise ?

Basil had made the acquaintance of Guiseppe Belsospiro when he first came to England four years ago, so that they considered themselves quite old friends. Guiseppe claiming also that privilege with the Signora Venetia, as he called her. In fact the fat good-humoured singer was quite at home in Cobbold Place, or would have been, only he felt that the distance, which on their first introduction had lain between him and Mrs Armfield, had in no measure been lessened by time ; but then Mrs Armfield was more or less a cypher in her own house, it being almost entirely governed by Basil. Among all her brother's friends—invariably welcomed with cordiality by Venetia—there was not one that she received so gladly as Signor Belsospiro. Perhaps it was partially owing to Venetia's unfailingly favourable reception that he went so frequently to the Cobbold Place establishment. Recently his visits had assumed a certain amount of professional colour, for

one evening, when more than usually under the dominion of Venetia's sweetness, he had promised her that whenever he had a disengaged half-hour he would come in and give her a singing lesson, of course expecting no money return. Mrs Armfield, who never lost a possible opportunity of getting anything cheap, did not object to this arrangement; on the contrary, she smiled more benignly on the signor than she had ever been known to do before. It was not an unusual thing for Guiseppe, as he is called in his little world of intimates, so to time his lessons to Miss Armfield, that Basil should come home from his office just as they were finishing, when sometimes they would all three devote half-an-hour to a little agreeable musical dilettanteism, enhanced in its character by the presence of a real professor—or occasionally, as to-day, the two would walk together as far as the house of the next pupil with whom Guiseppe had an engagement.

‘Where are you going?’ Basil had asked, as they sauntered down Cobbold Place arm-in-arm.

‘Chez Miladi George Heriot,’ Guiseppe had answered, pronouncing the name in such a way that none but Basil himself would have understood it.

That he did so was obvious from a certain amount of fluster there was about his manner, as he said,—

‘Going to Lady George’s, are you? I intended to have called on her to-day myself. She is leaving town, I believe, to-morrow.’

‘*Ça n’empêche pas*—we will together to this lady.’

It did not occur to the easy-going Italian that his presence during their interview was in the least likely to prove a *gêne*. Yet, in the society where they were both known, Basil Armfield’s attentions to Lady George were beginning to be talked of.

Lady George Heriot was a young widow, living with her one little child, Dandy, in the pretty house in Chapel Street, Park Lane, where Mercy had taken home the nicely-ironed fine things. She was very well off, very charming in her manner, and withal very pretty, a catalogue of verys

which made up a most delightful whole. And so a good many men thought, for wherever Lady George went she was generally surrounded by the other sex. Not that she was at all a flighty woman, quite the reverse; there was a certain dignity of manner about her, which always kept men at a very respectful distance, while some of her female friends had more than once been heard to observe that Lady George was far too devoted to little Dandy ever to let any other love come between her and her child. She had only been married two years when Lord George, whom she idolised, had died, and it seemed as if she had at once transferred to the one-year old baby all the strong love she had lavished so profoundly on the father.

In appearance Lady George was a tall graceful woman, with an aristocratic little head well set on sloping shoulders. She had quantities of silky brown hair done up in tight coils and smoothly arranged in front. It would as readily have occurred to Lady George to dance on a tight-rope as to wear a fashionable fringe. Her



features were very perfect, in fact almost too regular to be piquant ; but severity was saved by a pair of brilliant dark eyes, which often flashed an answer when spoken words failed.

Such was the heroine of Basil Armfield's day dreams, the one only woman he had ever thought worthy to fill his heart, though that she should ever love him in return he dared not hope. It never entered his mind to consider that he had nothing to offer her, that is, no gold or lands.

‘Had he not his love, his lasting, substantial, devoted love, and how could real love have aught to do with houses and lands and wealth, which rendered it a mere mercantile transaction ?’ So he would have answered had he been questioned on the subject ; so he reasoned with himself when he thought of his meagre clerkship and Lady George's far more exalted position. He did not heed the insinuations that the world might make, namely, that he wooed Lady George for his own advancement. What cared he what the world said as long as he obtained that priceless treasure, her love ?

The front floor lower room of Lady George's house in Chapel Street was a boudoir, the dining-room being built out at the back, and in this room she very frequently sat. By the time Basil Armfield and Signor Belsospiro reached the house it was growing dusk, but no candles were lighted within, though a cheery fire was burning in the grate. Between the muslin curtains, which were not quite closed, it was easy to see into the interior, more easy than perhaps the inmates were aware. On a sofa near the fireplace sat Lady George, beside her a little table entirely covered with knick-knacks. She had some work in her hands, but it evidently was not receiving a large share of attention. There was a bright colour on her usually pale face, a strange light in her eyes; they were fixed very boldly, almost angrily, on a man who was standing on the hearth-rug with his back to the fire.

This picture Basil Armfield took in at one glance as he and Belsospiro passed the window. The Italian made some remark about her ladyship having company, but

Basil did not answer him, only pulled the house bell rather violently.

The butler answered the door with such alacrity as almost to suggest the idea that he was in the hall, probably listening to the conversation going on in the boudoir.

The singing-master entered first. He was received with a cynical smile by the man on the hearth-rug, by her ladyship with a sort of half cry.

‘Oh, Signor Guiseppe, I had forgotten about the lesson. I meant to have put it off.’

‘Pray, don’t let me interrupt,’ and the visitor took up his hat. His eye fell on Basil as he did so, and the sneer on his face turned into a scowl, especially since he could not help remarking that the fair mistress of the house held out her hand to Basil as though it were a protection to feel a friendly pressure. His impulse was to put down his hat and seat himself, but he felt it was impossible, if he would retain admission into Lady George’s house in the future. Their interview had evidently been of a stormy nature. He would lose rather than

gain ground by remaining now. So he bade Lady George a rather elaborate good-bye, gave Basil a stiff bow, and swept with a kind of flourish out of the room, just as the butler came into it with the lamp.

‘Who’s that?’ asked Basil, a little peremptorily, considering he had no right to put any question at all. ‘Why does he bow to me? I don’t know him.’

‘Captain Denis? Oh, he is—well, he is a distant connection of mine. You must have met him here before and forgotten him,’ and she lay back in the corner of the sofa, looking very inert and listless.

It was evident her interview with Captain Denis, whatever its nature, had quenched all the fire which usually burned so brightly in Lady George’s character.

‘Will miladi put off her lesson?’ asked Signor Guiseppe, who saw there was something not altogether pleasant beneath the surface of Lady George’s relations with this Captain Denis.

‘I cannot sing,’ she said almost feebly. ‘I am not well. When I come back from the country— You will forgive me, Signor?’

‘I lay my profoundest respect at the feet of miladi,’ answered the Italian in his bad French, as he opened the door.

‘Shall I too leave you?’ asked Basil very simply.

‘No—you may stay if you like.’

He nodded a good-bye, full of meaning, to his friend, who passed out of the room with a little shrug of his shoulders, and going down the street towards the park failed to remark either Captain Denis, who had taken up a post of observation not ten yards off, or Mercy, who was watching them both.

Basil, meantime, drew a small chair close to the sofa, and settled himself for a chat.





## CHAPTER V.

AS A BROTHER.

**F**OR some seconds after the door had closed on Signor Belsospiro, neither Lady George nor Basil Armfield spoke.

It was obvious that something had occurred to irritate the lady, equable though her temper usually was. She could not exactly make up her mind to tell Basil what had happened, although she felt sadly in want of a confessor, and had he been a woman, he would probably have received a very gushing account of annoyances. From the heightened colour in her face, the way in which she played with first one and then another of the various things on the table in front of her, it was clear to Basil that her mind

was scarcely at its usual equilibrium, and naturally he connected Captain Denis with her unwonted condition of nervous excitement.

The subject worried him, and he was most anxious for an explanation ; yet it was difficult to broach it since the lady said nothing. Youth, however, is impetuous, and patience has its limits. He broke out at last,—

‘ So Captain Denis is a relation of yours ? ’

‘ Not exactly—a connection. Let me see, a sort of third cousin. A Denis married an aunt of my mother’s, and he is—’

‘ Spare me, Lady George, since we are neither of us Scotch.’

‘ My husband was a Scotchman. I wish Dandy to consider himself Scotch.’

‘ There is plenty of time for Dandy to assert his nationality.’

Though Basil was fond of little Dandy, partly for his mother’s sake and partly for his own,—he was a very engaging, affectionately disposed child,—he grew tired of hearing him perpetually quoted as he was on all occasions by his mother. The fact is, Basil Armfield was very jealous of Dandy, though

he hoped by dint of perseverance and assiduity to subdue the citadel at last, and put Master Dandy into a secondary position, whereas he now reigned paramount. Basil had little calculated on the Herculean labour he in his ardent devotion had set himself; perhaps he did not know the depth of maternal devotion in a true loving woman, who to the fullest degree recognises the duties of wife and mother. To the widowed Lady George every natural tie, every absorbing interest, resolved itself into the one word 'mother.' A tear of Dandy's would make her forget for a time that Basil existed. A summons to the nursery, because Dandy was fretful or in pain, and she would have run off in the middle of one of Basil's most interesting conversations. Yet she liked Basil Armfield, liked him well enough to admit him on intimate terms, now that she was perturbed and perplexed. Whether she loved Basil she had not asked herself. She had accepted him as an occasional pleasant companion, and since he had never yet ventured to make known his real feelings for her, she had not noted signs and symptoms sufficiently to suspect



them, and so she allowed the agreeable intimacy to dawdle on.

But to return to Dandy's nationality.

Lady George smiled as she heard Basil's somewhat testy answer.

'A child is what he is born, and the child is father to the man; *ergo*, it is never too soon to be Scotch,' she said, striving to speak gaily.

'Is Captain Denis Scotch?' he asked, with a sudden return to the subject which was first in his thoughts.

'Oh no! oh dear, no,' and the crimson blood coursed over her face as she answered him. He looked at her for a moment, then he drew his chair a little closer.

'What has this man said or done to annoy you, dear Lady George?' and with a temerity of which he was rarely guilty, he took her hand.

Basil had judged rightly; a bold measure was more likely to succeed with Lady George than a timid one, and it was a bold measure thus seeking to possess himself as it were by force of her secrets.

She snatched her hand from him, however,

and springing up went to the fireplace, where she stood facing the fire as she said, very excitedly,—

‘He has asked me to be his wife.’

‘Asked you to be—and you have—’

It was Basil’s turn to be excited, almost incoherent in his speech.

‘I have refused him most decidedly,’ she answered, interrupting him.

His countenance cleared up as if by magic as he too rose and stood beside her on the hearth-rug.

‘You do not care for him?’ he said, with a sort of triumphant gesture.

‘I have not said I do not care for him; but I am Dandy’s mother, and—and George’s widow.’

A veil once more came over Basil’s handsome face, the temperature of his nature rose and fell under this woman’s words as a tender floweret would in sunshine and cloud.

‘Still, if you really loved a man, such obstacles would scarcely be insurmountable.’

‘I have considered them otherwise,’ she said

in low tones. 'I have never considered it presumable that I should marry again, and this offer from Captain Denis has upset me.'

'Give it no farther thought—forget him.'

'Alas! that it were possible.'

'Possible for you to forget him?'

'I do not mean exactly as a lover; would to heaven he had never professed to be such; but he is so entangled in my life. He is one of the trustees under my marriage settlement.'

As a thunderbolt this piece of information fell on Basil Armfield. For some reason he distrusted this Denis, whom he had never seen before, though if he had considered the matter thoroughly he would probably have recognised that it was because he was jealous of any power he might now or in the future have over Lady George.

While she had been talking she had still stood looking at the fire with her back to him. He placed himself against the mantel-shelf facing her, striving hard if possible to obtain just one glance from her ever tell-tale eyes, as he said impetuously,—

'You do not love this Captain Denis?'

Only tell me you do not love him. Let me be your slave, your support, your friend. I ask for nothing but the permission to worship and to stand between you and this Denis.'

He had got his way so far. Lady George looked at him with a sort of half smile, mingled with astonishment, then she laid just the tips of her fingers on his coat sleeve.

'My dear young friend,' she said, assuming a sort of maternal air, 'should I have kept you here this evening if I did not regard you as a friend—a brother?'

'A brother! Oh, Lady George, give me a claim to a warmer place in your heart. There is no ardour, no excitement in only being loved as Venice loves me.'

'Apropos, when I come back from Blythwood, where I go to-morrow, you must bring your Venice and introduce her. I feel sure I shall like her. She has such a pretty name, and she is, moreover, your sister.'

'I will, with pleasure. But do let us talk about Captain Denis now.'

‘We shall never have finished with him, at least I never shall. I tell you he is mixed up in all my money transactions.’

‘But you do not love him?’

‘You foolish boy, what can it matter to you whether I love him or no?’ she said, pretending to ignore the interest he had just professed. ‘But since you are so anxious to be informed, no, I do not love him, nor shall I ever love him; on the contrary, dislike has more chance of being fostered than love.’

‘Thank God! then I no longer dread him.’

She did not go on speaking for a few seconds, but turned once more to the fire, as though taking counsel of the burning coals, then she said very softly,—

‘Let there be no misunderstanding between us, Mr Armfield. I am anxious—most anxious—that we should always be friends; if it were not for that reason I should scarcely seek this difficult explanation now. For it is difficult, and perhaps a little painful to me to make you understand exactly how matters must in the future

exist between us. It would, however, be selfish of me if I misled you now. I have refused Captain Denis to-day because I do not love him; but I should equally have refused any other man, because it is my determination to devote my life to Dandy, and not to marry again.'

'But, Lady George, how would Dandy suffer by your marriage? On the contrary, he would find an adviser and a friend in the man you selected for a husband.'

'I have seen so much unhappiness arise in families through second marriages that I will not risk it for Dandy. I myself had a stepfather. I know by experience what a changed house was ours after my mother's second marriage.'

'You will not admit, because you yourself have been unlucky, that there may not exist an honourable single-minded man who will love Dandy, and do his duty by him for the love he bears you, and him through you.'

'I will not say that such may not be the case, but I have no intention of proving it. My child, and the memory of his dead father,

constitute my love world ; beyond that, nothing exists but friendship.'

' Oh, Lady George, what cruel words.'

' I do not wish to be cruel, my dear young friend,' and there were tears in her eyes as she held out her hand to him. ' I only wish you to understand thoroughly the real state of my feelings, so that you may never be able to say I encouraged your visits here out of mere love of flirtation and coquetry.'

' Never could I say that of you ; but tell me—you do care for me just a little ?'

' I care for you very much, am most interested in all that concerns you—your profession—your musical talents—your family. I hope some day to make the acquaintance of your wife, and extend to her—'

But he interrupted her with an excited disclaimer.

' Never ! There is only one woman I shall ever ask to be my wife ; since she has decided otherwise, no one else shall fill the place.'

' Basil !'

Though she called him by his Christian name, it was more in anger than in love.

He did not attempt to answer, so after a

short pause she went on speaking very softly, almost painfully.

‘If these are your views, though I will not attempt to deny that I shall regret it, still, I am afraid our pleasant intimacy must cease. I do not think it would be just, either to you or to myself, to incur the frequent repetition of this sort of exciting discussion.’

‘Oh, Lady George, this is too unkind, too severe. What sin have I committed, save that of loving you, that I should be banished thus? Only let me be your friend, and I will promise to restrain all outward symptoms of my feelings, and to walk about the world a true embodiment of Hecla.’

She shook her head.

‘This is what grieves me,’ she said. ‘It is not right of me to allow it. You must overcome this passion, my dear boy, not merely seek to conceal it.’

‘With your help, there is no saying what time may effect; at a distance from you it will consume me and hurry me to destruction, if not to death.’

‘I don’t quite believe all these extravagant speeches; but then you say I am cold-hearted.’



Perhaps I am ; however, I will give you one more trial—only remember, whatever happens I warned you that all my love is centred in my darling boy, he is my passion, my hope, my life. My heart has been so created, that there is no room for two all-absorbing interests.

‘I will obey your wishes faithfully ; still you do acknowledge that you take some interest in my welfare and doings.’

‘Of course I do, but second to Dandy, always second to Dandy. No one can come before him.’

‘Second to Dandy! then I have gained an important point. Since you admit that I rank second to Dandy in your affection and esteem, I will defy the world.’

Lady George coloured up. She was a little annoyed that she had been foolish enough to make this acknowledgment. Having made it, she did not, however, see fit to withdraw, she only said,—

‘See that you merit the high place I have accorded you, so that I may never regret or alter my opinion.’

He raised her hand reverently to his lips

and kissed it, as he registered a vow to himself, that he would never cease to love her in spite of all the opposition she could offer.

She was thinking meanwhile if it would not be possible to her woman's wit to disenchant this young adorer of his love for her, and transform him into a loyal, true-hearted friend.

'Now, let us sit down and be rational,' she said. 'I am going away to-morrow, and I have several things to say to you before I leave.'

'You are going to Blythswood, to Sir Henry Connor's, are you not?'

'Yes, for a ball and race meeting. It is rather a bore, but I must go since I promised.'

'I wish they had asked me.'

'So do I, instead of me. It would have saved me so much trouble.'

This was not at all what Basil had meant, so he answered rather pettishly,—

'I daresay the change will be very good for Dandy.'

'Oh, he is not going. You don't think I would risk taking Dandy into the country

in this cold weather? Besides, his little foster-sister, Bessy, is staying here, and he is quite happy. Perhaps it is because Dandy is not going that I should prefer to stay at home.'

Basil did not answer, but his love for Dandy at that moment was of the slightest.

'You will look after him for me while I am away, will you not?' she went on, after a short break.

'I will do anything you wish,' he answered, with a bow; 'but I doubt if his nurse will altogether brook my interference.'

'Oh, I don't want you to feed him or wash or dress him,' she answered gaily; 'but come in and have a game sometimes. Dandy enjoys a romp with you; by the way, we will send for him now, but before I ring will you mind going to Cremer's to-morrow, buying a large dog—there is one in the window, on which Dandy has set his heart—and bringing it here to him from mamma? He is sure to be dull at losing me. Tell Cremer to put it down to me.'

‘Certainly, I will do it ; but as some one else will be dull at losing you, what am I to have ? A little dog ? I am second to Dandy, you know.’

‘You foolish man ! I’ll tell you what you shall do ; you shall see me off by the train. Oh, I forgot, you can’t get away from your office.’

‘I will be there,’ he said positively.  
‘What time does the train start ?’

‘One thirty-five, from Paddington.’

‘You will see me without fail ? It will be difficult, perhaps, to get away ; but what difficulty would I not overcome for you ?’

‘This is scarcely the compact, Mr Armfield. You must be careful.’

She rang the bell as she spoke, and desired that Master Dandy should be sent to her. In a few minutes he walked in, leading Bessy ; he had taken a childish infatuation for Bessy, and would not come without her. Since he was never contradicted in his smallest whims, of course Bessy was allowed to accompany him.

Dandy gave a little cry of delight when he saw Basil, who soon found that he was

expected to enact the part of a grown-up child. He had often done it before, and even with his twenty-six years and the weight of a hopeless love lying heavily upon him, all his boyhood was not dead, and he managed to romp so well and be so funny and amusing that the two children shrieked with delight. Lady George, meanwhile, sat in her corner of the sofa in a state of the most extreme enjoyment, her only wish being that Basil were ten years younger, in order to put all that senseless love-making out of the question, and, worse still, the prattle of outside tongues that would not let people enjoy themselves as they listed. Till seven o'clock the time passed rapidly, then the nurse came for the children. Lady George went to dress to dine at her sister-in-law's in Clarges Street, and Basil took his leave. As he walked slowly down the street ruminating on the events of the last two hours, he did not notice a man under a doorway leading to some stables. Yet there nevertheless was Captain Denis. The love he bore Lady George Heriot must have been strong,

stronger even than that of Basil himself, if it gave him the patience to wait for more than two hours in the street watching the go and come of the people from the house.





## CHAPTER VI.

### LOOK AFTER DANDY.

**Y**OU have got away from the office then?' said Lady George, as she put out her hand to Basil Armfield on the platform of the Paddington Station. 'I have had a fit of remorse ever since last evening for asking you to commit a dereliction of duty.'

'Such a grave one!' he answered, laughing; 'besides, my chief knows all about it, and I got away quite easily.'

'There is still ten minutes before the train starts. My maid is looking after the luggage—let us take a turn.'

Basil naturally was nothing loth, and they sauntered on as far as possible away from the crowd of porters and travellers.

‘I wonder what whim it was that made me ask you to come here to-day?’ she said.

‘I trust it was the feeling that as you would not see me for some little time, you wished to see the last of me.’

‘A week!’ she cried,—‘even an enthusiast like you would surely not dream of attaching any importance to a week’s absence.’

‘A week is seven days,—one hundred and sixty-eight hours,—ten thousand and eighty minutes,—only picture to yourself what may happen in that amount of time.’

‘Hush, for goodness’ sake, or I shall dub you a bore. Fancy giving me a horrible sum in addition for a railway companion—to-day too, of all others, when I feel the influence of a sort of vague terror.’

‘You do?’ and he looked at her very scrutinisingly. ‘Terror of what?’

She shrugged her shoulders.

‘That is just what I do not know; perhaps an accident, perhaps a parting, perhaps a death. Ah me, the anticipation of some dreaded event is almost as bad as the reality.’

‘But have you any reason for imagining that evil is in store?’



‘None in the very least; but I am seldom wrong in my presentiments, and I would give the largest diamond I possess not to be going to Blythwood to-day.’

‘Let me telegraph that you have been unavoidably prevented from coming, and accompany you back to Chapel Street.’

‘Turn coward, and at your instigation? Oh, Mr Armfield, I am quite ashamed of you! No; since I have set out on this journey I will go on. It may be only a false alarm; let us hope so. You will not forget my commission for Dandy. Poor little darling! he does not know I am leaving town. I am so glad I decided not to bring him.’

‘Now I know your real reason. It was not the cold that deterred you, but a sort of idea that there is danger lurking in this country expedition. Do let me entreat you to come back.’

‘No—a hundred thousand times, no. I have no fear for any one but Dandy, and he is safe at home.’

‘For no one else?—oh, Lady George!’

She coloured up, then she laughed.

‘You are always wanting to be petted and

remembered; you should not be so vain. See, there is only four minutes left. It is time to get into the train.'

'Miss it.'

'Nonsense. That carriage will do very well. Susanne!' to the maid; 'tell them to put in a foot-warmer.'

'You will telegraph when you arrive,' whispered Basil.

'Indeed not; what will people think? You'll hear soon enough if the train comes to grief. Good-bye.'

Notwithstanding her presentiment, she looked the livelier of the two; perhaps she had got rid of a portion of her alarm by passing it on to Basil, for he, on the contrary, was the very impersonation of misery.

She put her head out of the carriage window just as the train was moving.

'Look after Dandy and take him his toy.'

He lifted his hat, but had no time to answer her, only muttered, 'Dandy, always Dandy,' to himself, as he watched the train slowly move out of the station. Then he walked very leisurely away.

Perhaps he wondered what he had gained

by coming ; nothing in the world, except annoyance, and as for any good he had done, none, for the maid had been all-sufficient in making the necessary arrangements.

He did not take a cab when he left Paddington,—a shilling was always a consideration to Basil Armfield,—but started to walk to Regent Street, making one or two calls on his road, so as to time it that he might reach Cremer's about dusk.

Basil Armfield was too fine a gentleman to be seen carrying a woolly dog through the streets in daylight, even though that woolly dog was neatly done up in paper. In fact, for no one but Lady George would he probably have carried it at all, but would have requested the shop-people to send it.

However, after chatting away the intermediate hours, he finally possessed himself of the animal so much coveted by little Dandy, and started for Chapel Street, so timing it as to give himself just half-an-hour for play before he went home to the cosy late dinner in which the Armfields indulged, since Basil had been launched into a public career.

Crossing Grosvenor Square he met Guiseppe coming from one of the large houses where he had been giving a lesson. This delayed him for a few minutes, as Guiseppe had several questions to ask about Lady George and her departure, making such urgent inquiries about the Captain Denis they had met in her boudoir on the preceding day as somewhat to astonish Basil, who on no previous occasion had ever found Guiseppe inquisitive. He would not, however, acknowledge that he had any especial reason for instituting a cross-examination about this Captain Denis. Amongst his questions it had not occurred to Guiseppe to ask about the parcel his friend was carrying. Basil was grateful for the omission; he felt it would be scarcely dignified to be compelled to acknowledge that he was carrying a plaything to Dandy. At last, his head full of perplexing thoughts, he sped on to the well-known house in Chapel Street.

He rang the bell, but no one answered the summons; after waiting what seemed to him some minutes, he rang again very loudly, mentally objurgating the servants

for having taken the earliest opportunity, when their mistress's back was turned, to go out and amuse themselves.

'Not a single light—no gas in the hall. It is my belief they have all gone out of town together,' said Basil to himself as he went on to the pavement and looked up at the house.

Just at this moment the front door was opened a few inches, the safety chain having previously been hooked on.

'Who is there?' asked a female voice from the inside.

'What the devil does this mean?' asked Basil angrily. 'Where are the butler and the other servants?'

'They are all out,' was the answer from behind the door in a tremulous voice.

'Out—then why are they all out? Where is Master Dandy. Mrs White, his nurse, is not out, I suppose?'

'Yes, she is out looking for him.'

'Looking for him!—looking for Dandy? Open the door like a sensible woman, can't you, and explain what the deuce this is you are talking about.'

‘You are not one of them, are you?’

‘One of who?’

‘Why, the folks as have carried him off.’

‘Nonsense; open the door. I am Mr Armfield, a friend of Lady George’s; open the door instantly,’ and he shook it violently as he spoke.

She pushed it to for a second so as to undo the chain, and then let him into the hall, in which a kitchen candle, flickering at the far end, was the only light.

‘Now, then, tell me quickly, where is Master Dandy?’

The girl, for she was only the kitchen wench, looked frightened out of her life.

‘I dunno, sir, and if you was to kill me for it I couldn’t tell ye.’

‘No one is going to kill you, my good girl; don’t be frightened. At least you can tell me all you do know.’

‘Which ain’t much, for every one spoke at once, and then they took to quarrelling, and then they went out and left me to look after the place.’

‘But you must have heard something

when they all talked together. What did they say ?'

'As Master Dandy had run away in the dark and couldn't nowheres be found.'

'What was he doing out in the dark ?'

'I dunno, sir. He *was* out with Mrs White.'

Basil thought for a moment, then he said, half to himself,—

'It is absurd to imagine that the child is really lost. Tell me what has been done.'

'Mr Bennett, that's the butler, sir, he have gone to the police.'

'A good move ; but I should like to know how it happened. Just give me a match. I'll light the gas and wait till some of the upper servants come in. I have no doubt they will bring Master Dandy with them. Who is that crying downstairs ?'

'It is Mrs White's Dolly, sir. Her mother leaved her with me when she went out the second time.'

Basil went into the boudoir, where a few embers were still burning in the grate and Lady George's many little *chiffons* still

lay scattered about, much as they usually did. He put some coals on the fire, undid the parcel he had brought from Cremer's, and set it up in a conspicuous position, where it could not fail to attract Dandy's eye the moment he came in. So convinced was Basil that there was no doubt but that the little boy would shortly make his appearance with one or other of the servants.

For half-an-hour by the clock on the mantel-shelf he waited, but no one came. He began to get fidgety and to imagine there was some real cause for alarm—moreover, he wanted his dinner; but he did not like to go away till the child came home. He went out on the door-step and looked up and down the street. No appearance of Dandy; but presently slowly coming, as though from the park, he saw Nurse White. Generally an active, lively young woman, she seemed suddenly transformed into a state of halting old age.

'It surely is not true, White, that Master Dandy is really lost?' exclaimed Basil when she came near.

Mrs White, whose face was swollen with



crying, looked at him for a minute as though words choked her and would not become audible, then, with an effort, she blurted out sobbingly,—

‘The poor, dear lamb, and wherever he can be, I’d give my own life to know. I am glad you’ve come, Mr Armfield, for being a gentleman and my lady’s friend, you can tell us poor servants what to do.’

‘First, you must inform me what has happened. Why was the child taken out in the dark?’

‘Well, sir, we were to have early tea at my sister’s, who is married and lives in Quebec Street—that’s me and Master Dandy and Dolly. It wasn’t exactly dark when we left her house neither, and the children were wrapped up,—they couldn’t hurt,—so we come along through the park walking very quick, for I thought there was a man a-fol-lowing us. When we got to the lodge gate I was thankful, and drew a long breath of relief. I had Master Dandy tight by the hand, but Dolly, she is an independent child and will run alone. All of a sudden she trips over something as is lying in the way,

and then she is screaming and squalling on the path. I let go Master Dandy just for a minute like and picked her up, but she would not leave off crying, so it took a bit to pacify her, and when she was quiet and I looked round for the boy he was gone. I called him, but never an answer did I get. I caught Dolly up in my arms and wandered about like a mad woman, asking every one I met if they'd seen the blessed child, but no one had seen anything. Then I thought perhaps his own bright little intelligence had taken him home, so home I came, but he'd never been nigh the place. So I left Dolly and back to the park I goes, with no better luck. Whatever shall I do? and me as loved him as well as Dolly's self; and her ladyship, I shall never dare see her ladyship, her as idolises Master Dandy. I'll just drown myself before she comes if the dear child isn't found.'

'My good woman, it is nonsense to talk like this; vain lamentations will do no good; we must find this child, and at once. I believe Bennett has gone to the police,' said Basil rather sternly.

He was very angry with the nurse for her carelessness, and had but little patience with her whining and tears.

‘Come back with me at once to the exact spot where you lost the child. I do not believe that he can have strayed very far away from it!’ She followed him rather sullenly. Basil’s tone did not altogether please Mrs White, who in her strong love for little Dandy and her sorrow over losing him felt aggrieved that she should be considered to blame.

‘The man who followed you—what became of him? Where did you miss him?’ asked Basil, as they walked to the gate.

‘Oh, I never heeded him when I was taken up with the children.’

‘What was he like? Would you know him again?’

‘I never saw his face. He was a bit muffled up—had a big white handkerchief about his mouth.’

‘A gentleman?’ asked Basil.

‘I don’t know, sir; a youngish man—maybe about your height.’

‘You know all this about him and yet

you could not recognise him again,' said Basil sharply. He did not for a moment imagine that this man had aught to do with Dandy's disappearance, but he thought the nurse had been philandering, and that it was owing to this that the child had been lost.

She answered him grumbly, saying something about getting an idea of a person without thoroughly seeing him, and they walked in silence to the lodge, the nurse adding up a sum of small grudges against Basil for his interference, peremptory manner, etcetera; he, meanwhile, considerably irritated at the prolonged absence of the child, partly on account of its keeping him loitering about, partly because he knew how much it would have annoyed Lady George.

Basil had not yet been brought to attach any importance to Dandy's non-appearance, beyond the fact that it was occasioning much temporary inconvenience.

Arrived in the park they spoke to the lodge-keeper; they wandered about in all directions, but not a sign of the boy. Then they met Bennett, who had heard nothing

at the police station, but said he had been assured that Dandy was certain to be taken there if found straying, or any accident had happened to him.

Basil shuddered at the picture, and for the first time began to realise that the situation was a grave one. He telegraphed to his mother not to expect him home to dinner, and himself went off to the police station to offer a reward, and set all available machinery at work in a search for little Dandy.

No saying what the night might bring forth. He would not alarm Lady George till the morning.





## CHAPTER VII.

HENRY DENIS.

**I**F we only spoke when there was a reasonable necessity for saying something, how very far a hundred words would go!

But nineteen-twentieths of what we say is uttered for the mere sake of making conversation, and the reason of this is because we find chatting, though often a tiresome exertion, to be in the long run a more wholesome and less dull means of passing away time than either solitude or gregarious silence. Such is the experience of the majority.

Not so, however, of Captain Denis, late of Her Majesty's East Indian Cavalry.

Though eminently a man of action as well

as repose, yet action with him never took the form of superfluous words. He may have had little gift of conversation, or more probably he found no pleasure therein.

In his regiment he had been known as 'Denis the Silent,' until circumstances occurred which led to his rather suddenly resigning his commission, and from that day he had been designated Denis the something else. Without perhaps having incurred any violent hatred, it is doubtful whether any man ever quitted his comrades so entirely without leaving a regret behind him.

A vicious man in that he possessed nearly all the vices, he yet imposed on himself in each that 'so far and no farther,' which enabled him to maintain them all. For instance, he never allowed his passion for drink to interfere with his passion for play. He knew, as concerned strong liquors, what was his billiard limit, his whist limit, and his loo limit. He played these and several other games well. Some said *too* well.

A thorough-paced libertine, he preferred to win a woman by any means rather than

her affections. Fear, intrigue, avarice, he cared not which, so long as it was not spooniness. In one of his rare and laconic utterances he had declared one night in the mess-room, 'There is nothing I hate like love.'

This and a few more such speeches of his had acquired a spurious value from their rarity, and though never popular or even liked, Denis, while the least talkative, had been at one time by far the most quoted man in the battalion.

We have said he had nearly every vice, but he never swore, audibly, at least, and he was only half a coward. He had all the vulgar courage which springs from nerves of iron, and which enables a man to defy the strong, but does not teach him to spare the weak. To a horse or a dog he was a butcher, to a defenceless woman the most cruel of tyrants. You could, without being a Lavater, form an idea of his general characteristics from his outward man; but it would take more than human acuteness to read at any given moment what was passing in his brain. His taciturnity was written



on his thin, hard, sallow face, the only hair on which was a black silky moustache, curling down so perpendicularly over the mouth as to hide it completely, and also the teeth when he spoke.

His figure was tall and thin—long, rather than muscular, gaunt rather than graceful. He made up for this, however, by dressing with consummate care, even taste ; and, to give him his due, his manners and bearing, while not exactly attractive, had yet the stamp of good blood and good society. His age was about five-and-thirty, though he scarcely looked so much ; but his friends computed it from the fact that it was now a good five years since he had left the service. How many victims he had made in that time it would be hard to tell ; suffice it to say poor Lord George was one of them.

What he saw in Denis to like or to trust no one ever knew, least of all his wife, unless, indeed, he was fascinated by so complete a contrast to himself. Is it not somewhere said that we cling to those who develop our bad passions ?

Denis first of all taught his friend to gamble, and, having lit the flame, he never ceased to feed it; hence, perhaps, a considerable portion of the influence he had over him. If men like Denis were not capable of fascinating some natures, where would be their chance of success—their means of life?

Be it remembered in giving this portrait of Captain Denis, and laying bare his defects and vices, we are raising a veil which but few people saw lifted in its entirety. Five out of every six of those individuals with whom he was brought in contact in society would probably merely have passed verdict on him that he was not a very pleasant or very good-looking man, but that he was gentlemanlike—forgetting how much honour and courtesy are required to make up that very comprehensive title—a gentleman.

Had Lady George been asked to give her honest opinion of Captain Denis, she would have endorsed the foregoing statement readily, and probably have amplified it. But she judged it expedient to conceal

her feelings in a silence which, unlike his wonted 'yes and no' system, was golden. She regretted many things in the past on her husband's account—she regretted them in the present on her own, because to a great extent she felt herself to be in this man's power. If Lord George had entertained the same views about Denis as did some of the men who knew him the most intimately, he would scarcely have asked him to be trustee under his marriage settlement, or eventually have made him his executor; but Denis had managed to cast a glamour over his trusting friend, and had taken especial care that by no mistake on his part should it be removed.

The result of the power thus vested in his hands was that Captain Denis resolved to marry Lady George Heriot. He was not a rich man—men with his tendencies seldom are—in fact there were times when he found himself in a state of absolute impecuniosity.

Lady George's fortune would suit him admirably, even though it was in a measure tied up for the boy; yet it would be curious

if he could not make a nest-egg for himself. But Lady George did not smile on him. What matter, she must be coerced, not because he loved her, but because he craved the position to which, as her husband, he felt he should attain.

These were thoughts to which Captain Denis took care not to give utterance, but on which he acted. Basil Armfield had not heeded Captain Denis on the one or two occasions when they had met in Chapel Street; but Denis had taken the length and breadth of him, mentally, as he did of most people. While he had feared Basil as a possible rival in Lady George's good graces, he had at the same time rejoiced over the frank unsuspectingness of the young man's character, believing him thereby to possess certain conveniently plastic qualities. In this, however, he would probably find himself mistaken. Basil Armfield was by no means easily imposed on,—he could see in a fog as far as most men,—and there is no doubt that Captain Denis kept himself and his actions perpetually shrouded in a sort of mist. In fact, Basil was likely to be con-

stantly on the look-out for danger signals, owing to the dislike he had conceived for Denis on account of his proposal to Lady George, not because he was, as yet at all events, prejudiced against the man individually.

Ten o'clock and no symptom of the missing Dandy. It occurred to Basil that in Lady George's absence Captain Denis, being her trustee, should be communicated with. He did not know his address, but he had no doubt Bennett did, so when he brought him some cold meat on a tray, observing that 'he must be starving,' he asked him for it.

'Captain Denis hadn't got no home as he know'd on, but his club was the European.'

To the European then Basil said he would go, having eaten a hasty morsel; at that hour Denis would probably be found there.

He had done all that could be done, he believed, still it would be a satisfaction to communicate with a man belonging to the family. He was right in his conjecture. Captain Denis was at the European, and

greeted Basil with a cordiality to which he was so little prone, that any one more conversant with his character would immediately have suspected mischief. Basil, however, was too intent on the disappearance of little Dandy to take that opportunity of studying the individual peculiarities of the ex-cavalry officer. In a sort of rush of words he told his tale, and then, without stopping to take breath, he asked what was to be done.

Denis arched his eyebrows, stretched his haggard countenance into still more elongated dimensions, and then said,—

‘Impossible that the child is lost! Find him.’

‘I have put in motion every available resource I can think of. Can you suggest a fresh one?’

‘It is all so absurd—here in London—in this civilised detective age, the idea makes me smile,’ and he grinned with a sort of Mephistophelean curl of his lip.

‘Lady George will not smile when she hears it!’ exclaimed Basil, with some irritation. ‘I shall telegraph to her in the morning if the child is not found.’

‘Nor should I smile if I believed it,’ answered the other grimly.

‘Do you wish to insinuate that I am lying,’ and Basil grew fierce and hot.

‘Far from it, my dear sir; but you may be mistaken. It seems so improbable—the nurse must know where Dandy is.’

‘But she does not. I tell you she is wringing her hands—wailing like a maniac.’

‘I should like to see this woman and cross-question her.’

‘Just what I desire you should do. Let us go back to Chapel Street together.’

They called a hansom and drove off, but during their brief journey not a word was spoken.

Basil was thinking that his new acquaintance, if practical, was singularly undemonstrative. Captain Denis was thinking,—well, who but himself ever got to the bottom of his thoughts.

Arrived at Lady George’s house, Captain Denis asked the butler some pointedly leading questions, then he sent for the nurse. She came into the room sobbing, but im-

mediately expressed her satisfaction at the arrival of Captain Denis.

‘If you had only been here at the first, sir, perhaps we’d have found the blessed innocent by now.’

This was rather a back-handed blow for Basil; but then he remembered Mrs White owed him one for a little rough handling she thought she had received from him.

‘The case has been in able hands,’ said Captain Denis, pointing to Basil.

‘I don’t know,’ answered White, ‘older heads is better than young ones, and except us servants, there’s been no one here but Mr Armfield.’

Basil was on the point of asking her what she meant, after her own excessive carelessness, by insinuating that he had not done all that possibly could be done towards finding the child; but he was so paralysed by astonishment at what he deemed her impertinence that he did not speak, but left Captain Denis to inquire how in her opinion any one else could have done more.

‘Well, you see, sir, it’s five hours, going on for six, since the dear child was holding on to



my hand. They as has lured him away has got a long start.'

'Lured him away, Mrs White? What nonsense you talk,' cried Basil, starting up; 'by gross carelessness on your part you lost the child in the park, now you want to make out that he has been lured away.'

Captain Denis looked at Mrs White, Mrs White at Captain Denis, and a sign of some intelligence passed between them. Mrs White's glance testified information grudgingly given, while Captain Denis expressed without speaking that he received that information equally grudgingly and with much surprise.

A loud ring at the bell stopped further conversation. It was a policeman.

'Well, what news?' Basil asked breathlessly.

'Ain't got the child, but there was some one seen carryin' one answering to the description down Park Lane about five o'clock. He was a-hollering, which—'

'There, I told you,' broke in Mrs White, 'the man as follered me carried him off. I was sure of it. He—'

‘It was a woman as was carryin’ him,’ said the policeman, interrupting in his turn.

‘A woman!’ exclaimed the nurse and Captain Denis in chorus.

This new light on the subject evidently upset their theory.

As for Basil he was completely mystified; he had no fresh opinion to offer. He only turned to Captain Denis and asked,—

‘Do you believe now that poor little Dandy is really lost?’

‘It seems so. The next question arising is, whose interest is it to conceal the child?’

‘What on earth do you mean? Why should the child be concealed? Has Lady George any enemies who would wish to see her made thoroughly miserable?’

Captain Denis shrugged his shoulders.

‘There are so many intricacies in life,’ he observed quietly, ‘and after all it was only a suggestion.’

‘What is your opinion, policeman?’ said Basil, turning sharply to the officer.

‘Don’t think as the child has got muddled away, sir. I think he has took hisself off and got strayed.’

‘In which case we shall find him.’

‘Just so, sir. I should say in the morning, without fail.’

‘If we have not found him by eleven o’clock, I shall telegraph to Lady George.’

‘Exactly so. Lady George must be told, but first double the reward.’

It was Captain Denis’ suggestion.

‘Will you incur the responsibility?’

Captain Denis bowed—he was provokingly cool and practical, but what he did was to the purpose.

A few minutes later, if Lady George by some occult power had been able to peep, herself unseen, into her own dining-room, how astonished would she have been.

Captain Denis and Basil Armfield were sitting there together, brandies and sodas on the table beside them, cigars in their mouths, chatting on the most friendly terms; that is, Basil was talking, and Denis, by an occasional word or short sentence, was drawing him out.

Whether they expected little Dandy might at any minute open the door and rush in upon them unannounced, they did not say,

nor in fact did they give any definite reason for the night-watch they by tacit consent had both elected to keep. Nor was their talk either of her in whose house they were sitting, or of her boy. It had drifted into a sort of general conversation, bearing more or less directly on the life and occupations of Basil Armfield. In asking minutiae, which perhaps scarcely interested him, about the workings of a public office, Captain Denis was taking stock of his new acquaintance, and finding out for himself of what sort of stuff this young man was made, who, he firmly believed, like himself, was an aspirant for the hand of Lady George.

Whether Captain Denis gave any credit to the nurse's insinuation that Basil had ought to do with the loss of the child, at all events did not transpire during their evening's colloquy.

As for Basil, the idea had never penetrated into his mind that he could in any way be held accountable for Dandy's disappearance. One o'clock struck while the two men were sitting there. Basil jumped up.

'Is it any use waiting here longer? The

child is sure to have been taken somewhere for the night. I wonder if the servants are in bed ?'

He rang the bell. Bennett, looking very sleepy, answered the summons at once, and Basil gave it as his determination to go home and return by eight o'clock. If nothing had been heard of Dandy in the morning, he should telegraph to Lady George before he went to his office. He shook hands with Captain Denis and wished him 'good-night,' a little surprised that that individual did not accompany him down the street on his way to his lodging, wherever that mysterious retreat might be.

The door closed on Mr Armfield, however, Captain Denis began to sound Bennett as to his opinion of Lady George's young favourite, believing perhaps that servants were good judges.

It happened, however, that Bennett infinitely preferred Mr Armfield to Captain Denis, so there was nothing disparaging about Basil to be got out of him ; nor would Mrs White, only yesterday, have made a single injurious insinuation about the *ami de la maison*, who

was rather a pet with the servants. But he 'riled' her by being peremptory instead of condoling with her over her loss, and, moreover, she wanted some one who would bear the brunt of her carelessness, and she pitched on Basil without thinking into how many difficulties her haphazard hint might plunge the young man, or indeed involve herself, if it became necessary that she should substantiate it.





## CHAPTER VIII.

### MISGIVINGS.



‘**EVERYTHING** has been done that can be done: detectives have been sent in all directions.’

As they had been together in the little Chapel Street boudoir forty-eight hours ago, so Basil Armfield and Lady George Heriot were there together now. She was sitting on the sofa, her bonnet thrown down by her side, her hands clasped together in her lap, tears coursing each other silently down her ashen cheeks.

Basil was standing on the hearth-rug looking at her. It was but poor consolation he could offer her, and what little he did attempt scarcely produced an answer.

The boy had not been found, and Lady

George was in London in the first flush of her agony and despair.

‘Detectives to find Dandy! Oh, Mr Armfield, I cannot yet believe that all this is true! Where can he be? In whose hands? I think I would rather he was dead than roughly treated, and—’

She did not finish the sentence, but laying her head on the side of the sofa, sobbed with low convulsive sobs as though her very heart were breaking.

Basil, thoroughly overcome, knelt down beside her, and taking her hand, tried to kiss it; but she snatched it away, and springing up stood looking at him for a minute wildly.

‘No one can compensate to me for the loss of Dandy,’ she said; ‘besides, Nurse White says—’ She stopped as she remarked the large tear-drops that stood in the young man’s eyes. ‘No, no; it is impossible,’ she went on half dreamily as though talking to herself; ‘quite impossible that he—’

Basil for a moment imagined that from grief her mind was beginning to wander, and he spoke very tenderly and lovingly, begging



her to be more composed, assuring her that Dandy should soon be found.

‘And *you* tell me that *you*—but can I trust you?’

‘Most thoroughly and implicitly.’

‘Then why is he not here now? Why have you taken him away?’

He still believed her to be half delirious with sorrow, and judged it expedient to humour her.

‘You must give me time,’ he said, in the sort of tone one uses to coax a fretful child.

‘I cannot bring him back without some little delay.’

‘I do not understand,’ and she pushed her hair back off her brow, and looked at him excitedly. ‘Where is he? Tell me instantly.’

‘My dearest Lady George, if I knew, do you think I should keep the knowledge concealed from you for one instant?’

‘Mr Armfield, you are prevaricating. You do not perhaps know where my boy is at this moment, but you know full well who took him away.’

And there was a sort of tigress look in Lady George’s usually soft eyes which quite startled Basil, and made him answer very solemnly,—

‘On my honour, I know nothing whatever about the disappearance of the child beyond what you now know yourself.’

‘Is this the truth, the full, entire truth?’

‘Have I not given you my word? But why do you ask me these questions?’

She turned away from him with a sigh, and did not look him in the face again, but sat down once more on the sofa and hid her eyes in her hand as her arm rested on her knee. Poor Lady George! What she had suffered during the last few hours since Basil’s telegram had reached her was almost worse than when she had watched her husband’s last agony, for had she not learned to live a happy life again in his boy.

That Dandy was lost was surely misery enough, but that she should be forced to hear insinuations involving Basil’s loyalty in the matter,—Basil, on whom she had learned to lean, and whom she trusted as a younger brother,—made the burden even heavier to bear. And all this while, even with her sharp questions ringing in his ears, it did not enter into Basil’s head to conceive it possible that she really suspected him. He

knew how innocent he was of all save the purest, most honourable motives in connection with little Dandy, and ascribed Lady George's suspicions entirely to that sort of over-strained excitement which would make her lay the charge of her misery on any one who happened to be about her.

The scene between her and White had been a wild one ; dramatic in its strong-colouring, and had ended by the nurse, who had at first sobbed and prayed for mercy, refusing to bear the blame, and being ordered by her mistress to quit her presence and the house at once, which she proceeded forthwith to do, anxious perhaps to get away from one whom she had so much wronged, thus exemplifying the old saying,—

‘Forgiveness to the injured doth belong,  
They never pardon who commit the wrong.’

Before she left, however, she managed to strike the arrow home, which she had poisoned with a doubt of Basil Armfield's good faith. It was a vile and diabolical act, how vile and diabolical perhaps the wretched woman scarcely knew, for how could she guess

that she was depriving her mistress of the only consolation that was left her during Dandy's absence, namely, her perfect reliance on Basil Armfield?

After Lady George and Basil had had the short colloquy in which she more than half accused him, the silence between them became more dreary and irksome than before.

Though his heart was full of pity, the young man did not know what to say or do.

All day while he had been in Whitehall he had thought of no one but of Lady George, and the moment he had escaped from the trammels of official life he had gone at once to Chapel Street, to find that she had arrived about an hour previously in a state of frantic despair. If he could in any degree have consoled and comforted her, he would have been more satisfied; but though he had not arrived at discovering how much she misdoubted him, yet he felt that at that hour she barely tolerated his presence, if, in fact, at moments she was aware that he was there at all.

The clock on the mantel-shelf ticked on wearily, and not a word was spoken, till at last Lady George exclaimed,—

‘Take that thing away. Why have you put it there to mock me?’

The thing alluded to being the dog Basil had brought from Cremer’s for Dandy. He obeyed her at once, and put it in a corner behind some books. Then once more he went up to her and tried to soften the severity of her grief; but she repelled him coldly.

Then he pleaded his devotion, his love, in passionate words, more passionate than he would have dared to use, save under the influence of a stirring excitement. Nor, strange to say, did she seem as wholly indifferent as might have been expected. A strong love is a powerful antidote, even to the bitterest sorrow, and as she listened to Basil’s burning sentences, how could she continue to doubt his utter devotion; for did he not promise that he would remove every possible and impossible difficulty that lay in the way of finding the child, assuring her that he would ask for nothing in return but

that the smile might come back to her eyes and a kindly word to her lips? When he told her that she had no truer, no more devoted lover and friend on earth than himself, how could she resist his pleading, and set up Nurse White's insinuation against his honest words, especially since her heart, if truth be told, was with Basil.

'Besides, the woman knew nothing absolutely,' she reasoned; 'it was at the most a mere conjecture; she would banish it from her mind and accept this boy's proffered help and sympathy in her strait.'

These thoughts, producing an amended prospect for Basil, coursed through her brain with a meteor's swiftness, and she held out her hand to him.

'You shall find Dandy,' she said, 'and be not lover, but friend, truest and best friend as heretofore.'

He kissed the hand he held with reverence, and a fresh compact was sealed between them, or rather the old one was ratified.

She did not seem quite so desponding when she had made peace with Basil, but

talked to him softly and gently, though her sole talk was of Dandy. How could he expect that she would have room in that hour for any object in her heart save her boy? And he was content—content for the nonce to have the second place. If she could only have known how grateful he was for her favour, how delighted he would have been on her account to see Dandy's curly head appear, as it had often done before at the half-opened door, she would surely have regretted that she had for a moment been betrayed into a suspicion involving Basil Armfield's loyalty. He rang the bell and ordered some tea and made her drink it. Then they sat together and discussed over and over again from every well-worn point the dreary subject of the boy's disappearance, Lady George more than once starting up and declaring that she would go out and walk about London till she brought him back, only sitting down quietly once more in response to Basil's passionate pleadings that she would be calm and wait.

'A few hours and she must see her child again,' he said. 'It was impossible that the

police would fail in the search. To-morrow, too, advertisements promising one hundred pounds reward would appear in all the papers.'

She would shudder and be passive as she listened to his words. It was evident that Basil Armfield exercised a sort of hidden but potent power over Lady George that made her obey him even against her will. Yet she scarcely, as a rule, allowed herself to be dictated to. She had usually given, not sought, advice from others. Perhaps it was because her spirit was broken that she yielded so unresistingly to Basil's persuasions now, allowing the interview between them as it lengthened to become more and more of a love scene. That is, she gave Basil no promises, nor did he think it a fitting moment to ask for them, especially since he had accepted the second place in her esteem ; but she allowed him to make loving speeches, to call her by endearing names, which but two days ago she would have silenced with a frown. In fact, the loss of little Dandy was by no means so severely felt by Basil as it had been some half-hour



previously. He did not seem to note that Lady George's permission to be made love to was more passive and tolerating than absolutely encouraging. While Basil was doing the honours of the tea-table with a neatness for which his very domestic home and education had probably to be thanked, Bennett came in with the information that the nurse had packed up her things and was going; would her ladyship pay her. This terrible reminder of how useless a nurse was now in the Chapel Street household produced a fresh burst of grief from the agonised mother, who laid her head on the sofa cushion and sobbed more passionately than ever.

'Let me pay the woman and send her off,' said Basil.

'Do what you like; you will find some notes in my "Davenport" over there.'

He took the notes out of the drawer, and was about to go out of the room in search of the nurse, when the door opened again and she dashed in 'unceremoniously and threw herself on her knees before Lady George.

‘Forgive me, your ladyship; forgive me. It wasn’t my fault; indeed it was not. I love Master Dandy better than myself, and I’ll serve you and him for nothing all the rest of my life, if you’ll only let me stay.’

All Lady George could say was,—

‘Oh, White!’ hiding her face once more among the cushions from whence she had raised it, to give Basil some directions about the money. It seemed as though she could not bear to look on that dreadful nurse, to whom she had entrusted her precious all, and who had so utterly failed in the fulfilment of her duty.

‘Go away, White. You should not have forced yourself in here. You are only making Lady George more unhappy,’ said Basil very sternly. ‘I will come and settle with you directly.’

‘You!’ and Mrs White sprang to her feet and looked at Basil as though she would fain have annihilated him with a glance.

‘Yes, do leave me,’ sobbed Lady George; ‘some day perhaps I shall forgive you, but now it is impossible. If ever I should find my Dandy—’

‘Them can put their hand on Master Dandy as knows where they has put him, my lady!’ said the nurse so tartly, that Lady George looked up suddenly just in time to see a very angry suspicious look which the woman was darting towards Basil Armfield, who became crimson, not from remorse, as perhaps both the witnesses thought, but from anger and vexation that this woman should be permitted to torment her mistress by inuendoes, when he really believed she knew nothing whatever about Dandy’s disappearance, ascribing it entirely to her want of watchfulness over her charge.

Lady George did not attempt to speak, and Basil, his tone very rough and almost broken with anger, once more requested her to leave the room. She shook herself and went off with an air of great disdain, slamming the door, after muttering ‘That she would take nothing from him, and that, thank goodness, she had some money in the Savings Bank. She would come back and see Lady George some other time.’

Basil took two strides after her, but was stopped by Lady George saying irritably,—

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‘Leave her—let her go, for mercy’s sake. Oh, my God, is it not enough to lose my boy? Why, should I be tortured thus?’

‘Why, indeed? That woman should be made to suffer severely.’

She did not answer him, so he sat down on the sofa beside her and tried to take her hand, but she snatched it away, and, covering her face with both hands, hid it in the cushion.

‘Dearest Lady George,’—and he attempted to turn her towards him.

Neither of them had heard the visitor’s bell, but the door opened nevertheless, and the ‘Marchioness of Craigietown and Captain Denis’ were announced.

The former being Lady George’s sister-in-law, wife of the head of the house of Heriot, had been summoned by Captain Denis to give advice and sympathy to the sorrowing mother of the missing Dandy.





## CHAPTER IX.

BETTINA.

**T**HERE is probably no phase of instruction so grateful alike to master and pupil as the singing lesson ; for unless a man were so devotedly fond of music as to enjoy even the drudgery of teaching, he would never succeed as a professor of song ; and the vocal art has one delightful point of difference from other arts, in that the tyro's shortcomings are therein less apparent to himself. From the outset of his journey up the arduous ascent, he always fancies himself near the summit. It is only when he from time to time looks behind him that he discovers how long and rugged is the road he has travelled.

Then, again, although a singer is depen-

dent on labour and patience to a certain degree, he is so far less than — say the violin player or the sculptor. In other words, there is no art wherein natural gifts play so large a part of the constituent whole. Given a fine voice, a good ear, and natural taste and fire, a man or woman may make a triumphant public *debüt* within two years of their first lesson, although previously utterly ignorant of music; nay, it is even possible that to the end of a long and glorious operatic career they may never know *do* from *re*, sharp from flat, nor twelve-eight from common time.

What other muse, pray, accords her laurels so cheaply?

As we have said, our friend Belsospiro had now been giving lessons to Miss Armfield for some little time. Let us peep in upon one of these meetings and see how the pair get on.

First for the arrangements.

With charming *naiveté* the maestro, like a true apostle, looked upon all sublunary things as subservient to his art. Accordingly he had, with ruthless disregard for the

symmetry or comfort of the Armfields' only drawing-room, pulled the little cottage piano from where it stood against the wall right into the middle of the room, with its back at right angles with, and some eight feet distant from, the one mirror which graced the apartment.

'For you say in your Inglese "wolls 'av ears"; 'tis not why you have want to sing into dem,' he sagely remarked, going on to explain that the looking-glass served not only for the pupil to see that her attitude and mouth were as they should be, but enable the teacher to watch her likewise without constantly turning round, her standing somewhat behind him being unavoidable when both had to read from one copy. It was to have her reflected image well in view over the top of the music book and piano, as well as to give out his own notes the more freely when he sang to or with her that he stood rather than sat, the stoutest chair in the room, surmounted with three two-inch volumes of *The Illustrated News* being behind him. The music stool he had contemptuously flung aside from the first, with,—

‘What am I go to do with that pivotte? It is a trembling mushroom ; very good for a fairy!’

Indeed, the little man was at all times a stickler for position.

‘I tell you,’ he was fond of declaring, ‘zee impostor singer before he open his mouth—only alone by his pose.’

He was so palpably engrossed by his art in teaching that none but a fool would ever dream of taking exception to sayings and doings, which in a deliberate Englishman would never be tolerated. Thus, rather than break a movement he and Miss Armfield were singing together, he would push up her chin into the right position with the utmost coolness, or catch hold of her hand, making the remaining one of his own do double work on the keys, and by graduated squeezes impart the required expression of a critical passage. This secured, he would drop or almost pitch the fair member away as unconsciously as he had taken it.

‘Stand on zee two leg all bote, now a long bret.’

But we forget. Did we not promise to



spare our readers much of his unintelligible English? Very well then.

‘Stand upright, chest high, just like a soldier at attention. No; who said shoulders high, that is ruin. Shoulders low and well back; all right. Beware of resting on either side, and never touch the back of a chair or anything for support. Good. Now draw in a long breath slowly. Always breathe slowly in singing when you have time. Quick come, quick go, remember. Now then. Ah. No, not sliding up to it, ah—ah—but attack it at once—clearly as—Ah, no, that is not yet right, the sound does not begin sharply. Hush! I did not mean *loud*. Look at me, I will make you do it. Oh, never mind the trouble. It is the *premier pas*. See, now, take the note first in imagination with breath only. Let the position, everything be perfect. Oh! but you must smile, or the quality will suffer. Where is the *bocca ridente*? Good. Now, then. Very good. Now, *change nothing*, only let the breath vibrate and so become voice. Go!—Brava! Oh, what a difference! Now you have found it, remember the means

you used, and so spare us both the trouble and loss of time caused by the repetition.'

While perfectly courteous at all times, the little Maestro had a marked way of dropping his usual character of an adorer of the sex in general, and of Venetia Armfield in particular, the moment there was question of a lesson. His politeness remained but his gallantry disappeared. For all that he is gazing at her at this moment, as though life and death depend on what he beholds, in reality he sees no beauties but those of correct position and of obedient attentive interest; he forgets entirely that she is a woman, save in so far as she has a soprano voice. She is at most his artistic daughter, and as a songstress he intends her to be his creation. It is only when he feels that a good half-hour or more has been devoted to honest teaching and learning that he relaxes the strain, and though they remain where they are for an indefinite time, trying now this, now that new arietta, it is evident that they are no longer at school, that other subjects may be discussed, an interrupting visitor almost welcomed as

an audience, and in a word that life may be allowed to take once again its sauntering jog-trot. And the greatest change of all is in the bosom of Belsospiro. He has long loved, nay, passionately adored the fair Venetia, and not the least notable sign of this is that, always an earnest painstaking master, he is yet a trifle more severe with Miss Armfield than it is customary with the profession to show themselves towards mere dilettanti. He teaches her as if her bread depended on her success. This for him is the acme of compliment.

It had never dawned on Venetia to imagine that Guiseppe Belsospiro had any warmer feeling for her than that which he would necessarily possess for the sister of his most intimate friend. That she liked him she knew full well; that she looked forward, nay, even found herself counting the hours till her next lesson, there was also little doubt; still, she had not acknowledged to herself that she loved him. Love grows very silently and slowly in some women's hearts, especially in calm undemonstrative natures like Venetia's. Perhaps

it was fortunate that she had not discovered the tenderness for Guiseppe which was awakening within her, or assuredly a terrible sense of fright would have possessed her forthwith. Fright at the idea of Mr Armfield's unqualified displeasure, for Venetia, though she loved her mother, was somewhat afraid of her, fully aware that she only tolerated Guiseppe's visits to Cobbold Place, and would have put a veto on them altogether had she imagined that they tended to love-making. The external attributes of the fat podgy little professor, however, put such a supposition entirely out of the question as far as Mrs Armfield was concerned. It never for a moment occurred to her to imagine that the high musical gifts, which she might have acknowledged were in this ungainly little man, could be linked to a poetry of nature that could make Venetia look beyond mere outward form.

They have just finished their lesson, which has been longer and more severe than usual, and Guiseppe, having turned round on his chair, is confronting his pupil. For a

moment he looks at her and wonders why there are tears in her eyes ; the fact being that Venetia, though deeply grateful for the painstaking attention he devotes to her, is made just a little unhappy by his excessive severity. She does not altogether like being treated as a child, and if she did not love Guiseppe, most assuredly she would hate him.

He does not make any remark about the tears, but asks rather abruptly,—

‘Where is ze bruder?’

‘I have scarcely seen him for two days. Lady George Heriot’s little boy has been lost, and Basil has been trying to find him.’

‘Lost him? *Le beau petit Dandy. Mais comment!*’

Venetia gave him all the details as she had received them from Basil, while he had been eating his breakfast before going to his office in the morning. Belsospiro listened very attentively, partly because English, which Venetia was talking, was not very easily understood by him, partly because the subject, as well as the fair talker, interested him.

When she had finished, he muttered, '*Ah chère, ah chère, quel drôle d'histoire,*' several times over; then he turned round to the piano and began playing with one hand, as though the sounds he brought out of the keys helped to throw a ray of light on the matter. After a second or two he stopped as suddenly as he had begun, and, turning once more to Venetia, said,—

'Shall I see dis Basil?'

'Unless he goes to Lady George's from the office I suppose he will come home. Yesterday he spent all the time before dinner at Lady George's, but then she had only just come back on the receipt of Basil's telegram, and was of course terribly upset about the child.'

'Poor lady, poor lady! But I must see your Basil, signorina.'

'Wait a little while, perhaps he will come.'

'*C'est ça, c'est ça.*'

And then Guiseppe, without addressing any farther observation to Venetia, took a letter out of his pocket and began reading it very attentively.

She thought him rather discourteous, and, taking up some work, sat down by the window, and did not attempt to speak to him.

‘I am bodered, as you say in your Inglese,’ at last he observed, and Venetia could not forego a smile, though at the same time she was sorry for the look of worry she perceived on his face as he knitted his brows together, and of course she forgave him forthwith for his seeming disregard for her.

The letter was the same he had received two or three mornings ago when he had asked Mercy to get him some breakfast, preferring to con it over by his own fire rather than take it to the restaurant. It was written on very thin paper, and bore an Italian postmark.

‘This letter is a great secret, and yet asks for information,’ he went on, explaining to Venetia in his curious lingo the subject which he had announced was bothering him. ‘The difficult question is how to keep the secret and yet get the information?’

Venetia did not answer him. She was just a little provoked that he should wander

so wantonly from the disappearance of little Dandy, about which she was very much interested on Basil's account. If the subject of this letter was so vividly in his mind, why had he not mentioned it at the beginning of that somewhat terrible lesson, instead of waiting till the very moment she had told him about little Dandy?

'Can you not help me, Signorina Venetia?' he went on after a pause, during which he had been obviously waiting for the sound of her voice.

'I will with pleasure, if you will tell me how,' she answered, roused into interest by the almost pitiable accent in which he spoke.

'*Ah, voilà qui est difficile*—much. Much difficult. How you say in your Inglese, Shall I find a needle in de hay?'

'As you say it is not easy, but tell me what your needle is like.'

He turned the letter round two or three times, and finally handed it to Venetia.

'I have this letter for three days, signora; you shall tell me what it is I must do.'

Venetia looked at the letter; it was written in French, and marked 'Private.'



‘Have you the right to show me this letter, Signor Guiseppe? Have I the right to read it?’

‘Si, si, si. It is from my good friend and cousin in Napoli. He would love you as I do if he saw you. Read, but be silent.’

Venetia blushed at his words, which, however, she merely construed into a foreign *façon de parler*, and proceeded to read the letter.

Probably her hesitation over so doing would have been of far longer duration could she at all have guessed aught of the contents.

As it was, having finished the first page, she offered to return him the missive, but he begged her to go on to the end and tell him what was to be done. She did as he desired her, held as it were in a sort of thrall by what she saw inscribed on the paper before her, and did not again raise her eyes till she had taken in every word of the somewhat lengthy epistle. Then she put it down on the table beside her, and looked up at Guiseppe Belsospiro, while a sort of shudder seemed to pass over her.

He watched her very keenly, as though he were criticising from a dramatic point of view the effect that the story that paper revealed would have on the usually undemonstrative temperament of an innocent, pure-minded English maiden. It was a cruel ordeal if such were his object, and one from which an Englishman would have recoiled ; but we will do him greater justice than to imagine his motive was other than the honest one of seeking advice and help.

‘It is a horrible story. Can it be a true one?’ asked Venetia, with a shudder.

‘As true as the holy writings,’ was the fervent answer.

‘And the hero of this fearful history is or was one of my compatriots, eh Signor Giuseppe?’

‘*Hélas ! oui.* He was in Italy before I left. I heard of the wrong of Bettina when I was in Napoli.’

‘And she is dead—dead, and her baby boy, poor Bettina!’

‘Will you be silent as the death—tell no one you have seen that letter, and help me to find this—this Englishman, this betrayer and

murderer of Bettina,' and the little Italian, though he spoke almost unintelligibly in his over-excitement, drew himself up and looked as proud and pompous as though he were playing first tenor in some grand *opera seria*.

'I will,' replied Venetia, very earnestly. 'I will tell no one—not even Basil.'

'Benissimo. It is well the good Basil should not know. It may be a serious affair, and for a man a dangerous one.'

'Then certainly Basil shall hear nothing of it from me,' said Venetia. 'Thank you, Signor Guiseppe, for taking me into your confidence instead of him. I will assist you in every way, and woman's wit, you know, is no mean ally.'

The little Italian looked very pleased, the fact being that he was delighted at having a secret in common with Venetia—a secret too which it would take perhaps weeks or even months to unravel.

That Guiseppe had been *impressioné* on the receipt of the said letter there is little doubt; but the impression to a great extent had worn off. On a man accustomed to mix even actively in many a scene of guilt and

crime, it was not likely to have as lasting an effect as on Venetia, who for days and weeks to come would picture the betrayed Bettina dying slowly in the sunshine among the Italian vineyards, the sun in her heart having set for ever, though she gazed longingly into the face of her boy, and perhaps for his sake wished that it might rise again. For the letter said this Arnold, this Englishman, had married Bettina in the parish church before the whole village ; had lived with her for six short months in the cottage among the vines, and then had gone away to Paris, as he said, for a while on business. Once only had a letter come, bringing money for the desolate wife, and then no farther tidings of Arnold. The simple Italian villagers believed him to be rich, and thought every day he would return with the wealth he had been heaping for his bride. But the baby came and the mother died, and still no tidings of the Inglese Arnold.

So Bettina's father, who was Guiseppe's brother-in-law, though he was only a peasant, got the priest to write the letter asking

Guiseppe to search through England for the missing Arnold, as in Paris at the address he had given no such man had ever been heard of, and even the honest peasants were beginning to think that Bettina's marriage had been no marriage at all, and were crying *vendetta* on the betrayer.

Such was the tale confided to Venetia, which moved her so strongly that she promised with all her knowledge and power to help Guiseppe in his search for this Arnold, who, he maintained, was without doubt an Englishman, though he himself had never seen him.

For a long time Venetia and Guiseppe discussed what was to be done ; but beyond that his name was Arnold and that he was a British subject there seemed to be no clue—hence finding him, to Venetia's practical mind, seemed almost hopeless. The Italian, however, evidently believed in the chance or Providence, call it which you will according to your amount of religious faith, which leads people sooner or later to a desired goal.

‘Was it some such feeling as this which

had led him to speak of Bettina's sad history in connection with little Dandy's disappearance?' she asked with a half smile.

'*Mais non—mais non*—but it had nevertheless occurred to him that the agents employed to discover the little boy must be the very people to trace this Arnold.'

'Yes, there was sense in that,' Venetia answered meditatively, 'only Basil must not know—would he leave her two days to sketch out a *plan de guerre*?'

'But with pleasure, she was ze sweetest little houri he had met,' and without warning Guiseppe threw himself on his knees before Venetia and began to kiss her hand with loud, vigorous kisses. Just at that moment the door opened and a head appeared. Fortunately it was not that of Mrs Armfield, but of Miss Susan Ford, a little dressmaker who was working by the day at some of Venetia's finery, and who was wondering why her usually indefatigable companion, Miss Armfield, had not come to show her how she was to go on with her work.





## CHAPTER X.

NOT MUCH GOOD.

**T**HE morning hours were, as is usual with most working families, the busiest in the day for the Jennetts. Job would apply himself to his needle and scissors from breakfast till dinner-time without sometimes uttering a word, or so much as raising his head except to transact business with some customer. The Amazon, however, this morning receives more attention than the broadcloth on which he is engaged; probably he is expecting that a crowd of customers will at once throng his shop door, so perpetually does he look across the shoulder of the lady in question into the street—a crowd there certainly is, but it is scarcely com-

posed of the element calculated to benefit him financially, being mainly a collection of loafers from the neighbouring streets who have come to gaze at what they are pleased to call 'Jennett's wax doll.'

As for Mercy, she keeps persistently in the back part of the premises, and is very silent and moody. The world has not gone well with Mercy during the last twenty-four hours. She is thoroughly annoyed—annoyed with Jim Burritt, who did not return, as she expected, annoyed with Job for making himself and her the laughing-stock of the whole street, as she firmly believes.

'And I shouldn't wonder if the Sennoor was to take and give notice,' she muttered as she tried to do her work in her usual active way. 'I'm sure I should if I was him. I wouldn't live a-top o' that ridiculous-looking figure. But lor' there's no knowing what a man will do, they're cracked the best of them; but I did think as Dad had some sense.'

Then she sat down and thought a bit. Was it of Job or of that other man whose



behaviour fell so very short of her expectations? After a few minutes she got up.

‘I must be doing, else when Jim comes the work will still be about, and there’s nothing he hates like seeing things made comfortable. If ever a man wanted machinery it’s Jim; everything to his hand, but nothing to show how it comes there, that’s him.’

And thinking of Jim, and thoroughly making up her mind that he might come in at any moment, Mercy became brisker, and having finished clearing up the little back parlour, went up to do a turn at sweeping the Sennoor’s apartment, just to pass the time, as she said, much as a fine lady would take up the last importation from Mudie’s. The Sennoor had gone out, and had not even stopped to look at ‘that there doll,’ which was some consolation to Mercy. Fortunately she did not know how he stood and shook his fat sides with laughing at it last night when he happened to come in about ten, and had said to himself that ‘there must be some foreign blood in Job, or he would never do so

unenglish a thing as give a sign to his shop.'

The hours passed on, Mercy's heart failing her more and more as the clocks of the neighbouring churches marked their flight, for Jim Burritt did not come, yet Mercy felt very sure that he was not at work. Could he really be so aggrieved by what she had said that he meant to have nothing farther to do with her. And she, too, stopped work as the thought took firmer and firmer hold of her, and at last, after she had given Job his one o'clock dinner, during which but few words were spoken, and in the eating of which Mercy played but a very meagre part, she actually sat for a while with her hands in her lap, looking as inert and listless as any love-sick miss.

But with all her sorrow over Jim's defection, pride—so called proper pride, that is the pride that keeps a woman straight—had a very prominent position in Mercy's character. She would go out; she'd been 'a dawdling all the morning waiting for him, and if he didn't choose to come,

well, he wouldn't find her just the very minnit as pleased him.'

Once more she donned the tidy crimson frock and popped her head in at the shop door, speaking to Job more pleasantly than she had done since the arrival of the Amazon.

'I'm going out, Dad. May be I sha'n't be in to tea, but I've put it all ready. Susan Ford asked me to come along, and I think she's at home to-day.'

'All right, my girl; I hope you'll enjoy yourself, but don't get too thick with Susan Ford neither, she's a flaunting lass though she was your school-fellow.'

'She's a bit bright, and does me good with her jokes. She sees a good deal of life going about to grand folk's houses.'

'Ay, and she profits by what she sees,' answered Job.

'Don't you like Susan, dad?'

'I ain't sure of her; she's mealy-mouthed enough, but that ain't everything, and her old mother ain't much good, of that I'm very sure. But if you keeps your eyes wide open, Mercy, you can see as *fur* as most people, and surely you won't let them Fords do you an evil turn.'

‘I don’t see any ill as they can do me. I’ve nought to do with their affairs nor they with mine. But it makes a change like to hear Susan’s accounts of the folk she sees when she’s working in gentlefolk’s houses, and the fine clothes the ladies wear. No wonder she dresses herself up a bit when she can make the swells look so grand.’

Job Jennett smiled and wondered whether he would ever wear cut-a-way clothes because he sometimes made them for people in a better position than himself; but he only told Mercy to run along and be happy, and bring him back a bit of the news she heard.

Susan Ford, Mercy’s particular friend, was a young dressmaker who went out to work by the day. Though only eighteen, she was considered very clever, and was in request at various houses in the neighbourhood of Portland Place, a fact which made her rather bumptious, not to say a little pert. She was a very genteel-looking girl, and quite good-looking enough for some men to think her pretty, and as Mercy had observed, she dressed very well, always finding time to do herself up a bit of finery. Altogether Susan

Ford considered herself a very superior young person to Mercy, whom she rather condescended to patronise; in fact would have done so very considerably, only she knew Mercy had both temper and pride, and for certain reasons of her own she judged it more expedient not to have what she elegantly called 'a row.'

Mercy had calculated correctly—Susan was at home, but she did not seem quite so pleased to see her friend as might have been expected, since she apparently was not particularly occupied, and, as a rule, whenever she had a little leisure nothing gave Susan more pleasure than to air her knowledge of the ins and outs of certain grand houses for Mercy's edification, treating the little odds and ends of gossip Mercy supplied about the servants at Lady George's as very secondary, considering that she came into actual contact with the 'real gentry themselves.'

She was, however, very short with Mercy on that particular afternoon, did not tell her anything of interest; in fact, would hardly converse about a dress she was making for herself, and of which scraps and bits were

lying about the room, which was a back parlour. Susan Ford and her mother lived in a little house of about the same importance as the Jennetts in Smith Street, and let it off in rooms, not, however, having what Susan was pleased to call a 'dirty foreigner in the first-floor.' Of course the sentence showed she was jealous of the Jennetts having the Sennoor for a tenant, still she did not own it.

Mrs Ford was a coarse-looking unkempt woman with a loud voice and boisterous manner ; as you looked at her you wondered how she came to be Susan's mother—Susan, who was so soft and genteel and mealy-mouthed. She was not in the room when Mercy went in, and she asked what had become of her, not because she was particularly interested in Mrs Ford, who in her opinion generally spoiled her pleasure by sitting over the fire making disagreeable remarks. She asked, because knowing that this back parlour was the only room the Fords reserved for themselves, sleeping, cooking, and living in the same apartment, she wondered what had become of the old woman.

‘Mother’s busy,’ was the short answer.

Of course Mercy could not ask of what her mother’s business consisted, but she thought it odd, nevertheless, though she proceeded to give Susan an account of Job Jennett’s Amazonian investment, as if she did not attach any importance to any little singularity she might have observed in the Ford household.

Susan, however, did not seem particularly interested in the relation, but kept looking at the door, as though she either wished Susan would go out by it, or expected some one would come in. Mercy could not help noticing that her visit was scarcely welcome, and after a few minutes’ conversation got up to go away, not being asked to stay for tea, as she usually was by the hospitable Susan.

Directly Susan found that her visitor was going, she became far more civil, and getting up from her work stood talking to her for a minute or two with her habitual pleasantness. Half-a-dozen sentences, however, had not been interchanged before the door was thrust open with a kick, and who should walk in but Jim Burritt. He looked very

‘Have them? why, of course. Did you ever know me go from a fixed notion, lass?’

‘Mr Burritt would not be a man if he was not obstinate,’ observed Susan, with a little giggle.

But Mercy did not utter a word, only walked a step or two nearer the door, which was standing open.

Coming down the stairs was Mrs Ford, a large bundle of what seemed to be old clothes in her arms.

‘Why, bless us, there’s Mercy Jennett!’ she exclaimed in her loud noisy way, ‘Strange as a man can’t do nothing without a woman. ’Spose now as Jim Burritt have dragged you along of him.’

Jim, however, put in an instant disclaimer, by saying very pointedly,—

‘Mercy disapproves of my selling my uncle’s business, so I’ve told her nothing about it.’

Mrs Ford set up a loud shout of laughter as she pitched all the clothes she was carrying on to the parlour floor, especially as Mercy tossed her head, and saying,—‘I am sure I don’t want to pry into your



secrets, Jim, if you don't want to tell them,' went straight out of the house.

For a second Jim looked as if he were going to follow her, then he evidently thought that Mercy's temporary displeasure—for he believed it to be only temporary—was quite secondary to the business he had in hand, and he turned to Mrs Ford.

'I thought it was agreed as you wasn't to blab,' he said fiercely.

'I ain't said nothing,' she answered with a sort of dogged penitence, 'as I told you this morning there is facts as will speak for theirselves.'

'Well, let 'em, but you hold your tongue, that is if you knows how.'

'Is it settled?' she asked.

'It won't never be settled if you don't keep counsel, at least you'll be settled and get into a jolly mess.'

'But when is he coming?' she persisted.

'I dunno—maybe to-night—maybe not for a week. I'm to see the gentleman in an hour and I shall hear more particklers.'

'And you say the poor lad have lost both his parents.'

‘He have, and he’s not got no home whatsomever, and so if you’re kind to him for a bit, I’ll warrant you’ll get some money out of it.’

‘I wonder you did not recommend Mercy,’ said Mrs Ford, at which her daughter looked very angry, and then simpered to Jim as much as to say,—

‘You know where to find gentility;’ but he did not heed her, only said,—

‘Job Jennett is a rum sort of chap, and I didn’t want to have no row, supposin’ he did not get on with this ’ere gentleman. That’s one reason I’ve said naught to Mercy, and don’t you neither let on as I’ve anything to do with it.

‘Mum’s the word with me,’ answered Mrs Ford. ‘I see now where the corns is—be sure I sha’n’t tread on them.’

‘Do ye?’ remarked Jim with a smile. Perhaps he did not altogether believe this latter statement.

‘Will you have a cup of tea, Mr Burritt?’ asked Susan, taking a dress off the tea things, which she had thrown there to hide them from view as Mercy entered.

‘Well, I don’t mind if I do,’ he answered, seating himself, and in a few minutes they were all three drinking strong Bohee and eating bread and butter with a sociability which would scarcely have charmed Mercy had she seen them.

The conversation meanwhile was chiefly of Jim’s prospects; they did not again allude to the business which had brought him there till he took up his hat to go, and then he merely reminded Mrs Ford that her services might be required at any moment, and he went off, leaving the mother and daughter in the best of spirits and on very good terms with themselves. Especially Susan, who was delighted that Jim had selected her for a position of trust in preference to Mercy, ascribing it in her self-conceit to her superior manners and refinement. She might not have been quite so satisfied had she conjectured what a far higher opinion Jim had of Mercy than of her, and that the bit of business he had brought in the way of the Fords he would not have taken to Mercy for the world, believing her to be far too high-minded to meddle with it. And he was right.

Yet Mercy had gone home with a heavy heart; jealousy had been awakened within her, and her friendship for Susan Ford had died in the very instant that she had suspected Jim Burritt loved her.





## CHAPTER XI.

### AN ITALIAN DINNER.

**T**HE stealthy smile that crept over Captain Denis' face, the haughty look that he himself received from Lady Cragietown, did not escape Basil's observation as he started back from his close proximity to Lady George, and took up his position with a countenance burning with anger and vexation on the hearth-rug.

Denis, from some reason, scarcely from loyalty, sought to cover his confusion by beginning a conversation with him as though he had perceived nothing. A piece of patronage for which Basil was not perhaps as grateful as might have been expected, and which he received at first with much reserve.

. Gradually thawing, however, as he recovered from his annoyance, he allowed himself to become at all events seemingly interested in Captain Denis' talk, which, after a mere observation about little Dandy, drifted on to general subjects, till Denis at last suggested that they should go and take a stroll, since the two ladies would probably prefer to be left alone. Basil could scarcely refuse, so with a warm handshake, which was the only expression of feeling he dared, under present circumstances, manifest for Lady George, he followed the cousin into the street.

'What are you going to do to-night?' was the next query.

'I have no engagement,' was the brief answer.

'Then let us dine together,' replied the captain, whose great object was to prevent, for that day at least, any farther meeting between Basil and Lady George.

'Certainly, with pleasure. Where shall it be?'

To have said 'at my club' would have entailed paying for another man's dinner,

which was an outlay Captain Denis always avoided with the most scrupulous care, so he answered,—

‘Wherever you like.’

‘I don’t know much about restaurants, having a home in London,’ answered Basil, ‘but there is an Italian place Guiseppe talks about.’

‘The very thing. We’ll break some fresh ground. Where is it?’

‘Not far from our house, where, by the way, I must call to tell my mother I shall not dine at home.’

‘So be it. It is now six o’clock. I’ll look you up at home at seven, and we’ll go together. Will that suit? I have someone I should like to see in the meantime.’

‘Perfectly, and if I see Guiseppe I’ll ask him to go with us. He will put us *au courant* with what to eat, drink, and avoid.’

Thus it was arranged, and Basil sped off home at a brisk pace, his mind full of many thoughts, none of them, however, leading him to imagine that the man with whom he had just been holding colloquy had set a well-baited trap to ensnare him. He

arrived in Cobbold Place just when Venetia, having been summoned by the little dress-maker, had left Guiseppe alone to gather up his music and prepare to take his departure. Nothing would give him greater pleasure than to go with his good friend to this *petit diner*. Had he not been wishing to initiate him for a long time past?

So when, according to appointment, Captain Denis called for Basil Armfield at seven, he found the maestro also awaiting his coming.

Arrigo Abbrugnido's restaurant was a queer little place, very unlike the palatial dining-halls in which London abounds. It was merely a small confectioner's shop, etcetera, through which you passed to a sort of extension, of a most limited description; in this *annexe* some half-dozen minute tables were to be seen, all ready laid, and all occupied but one, which had evidently been retained for the signor. They were surely the narrowest dining-tables ever seen, not being an inch over two feet broad, while their length was at most three feet six. The ceiling was low and discoloured by the



gas, and a couple of mirrors, neither handsome nor bright, were the only attempt at decoration the place contained. In large letters, on a card conspicuously hung on the wall, was the device '*Libero è lo sfogo.*'

'You know we leave everything to you, Guiseppe,' said Basil. 'We are lost sheep here if you won't be our shepherd.'

'O! right,' responded the Italian cheerily. 'I feed you as Italians, is it not?'

'Italians we are,' said Denis.

'Pray,' inquired Basil, 'is there a *table d'hôte*, a set dinner, or does one order from the carte?'

'From the carte, certainly. Oh, we love liberty too much ever to submit to being told what we are to eat.'

Basil and Captain Denis were in evening dress, but in this they differed from every one of the other customers.

The worthy padrone or master of the establishment now left his post behind the counter, and came in deference to his new patrons personally to learn their wishes. Abbrugnido was a round little man of some forty years, dressed in the white livery of

a cook, and who looked as if he had long liberally partaken of the good things he was so skilled in preparing. His face had that comfortable look which generally accompanies a well-developed double chin. He was far more like a gentleman, both in education and manners, than you would have thought possible in one of his calling, unless you happened to have been in Italy, where such phenomena are by no means rare. As he stood there, a mere servant taking orders, both Basil and the captain could not help remarking that there was in Arrigo Abbrugnido a well-bred ease, and even a native and thoroughly unaffected dignity, which yet formed no such comic contrast with his occupation and dress as would inevitably have been the case with the most genteel of English licensed victuallers, and even with the great majority of French *chefs*. It surprised his two friends not a little that Belsospiro cordially shook hands with this maestro, and kept addressing him familiarly as 'Abbrugnido,' and even as *caro*, during the important discussion which ensued upon what was to be par-

taken of both in solids and liquids. No wonder, then, that when a few nights later Basil Armfield met Abbrugnido in the *couloir* of Her Majesty's Theatre dressed in faultless style, with Jibus under his arm, he blushed like a true Saxon to think 'And that swell cooked my dinner last week!'

But we digress. Before arranging the bill of fare, the maestro formally presented 'mine host' to his companions, mentioning, as though it were the simplest thing in the world, that he, Abbrugnido, had served the King of Italy as a lieutenant in the same regiment in which a brother of his own was now captain, and had distinguished himself at Solferino, and possessed a medal with two clasps as a memorial of that campaign. 'But alas,' he explained, 'the army in our country is still even a worse profession, pecuniarily speaking, than the church of united Italy has become. I mention this,' pursued Belsospiro, 'because in this rich England, while modern exigencies have removed all your old aristocratic prejudices against commerce, the dire necessity of

money making has not yet included in the ranks of society those engaged in anything like manual labour.'

It is needless to say that of the rapid part of the conversation which regarded the business of the evening, neither Armfield nor Denis understood more than a word here and there.

They took their seats, and the musician resumed the broken thread of his discourse, telling how Abbrugnido's father had never been anything more than a rich hotel-keeper at last ruined by speculation, but that he could assure them that cases were to be counted, not by dozens only, but by hundreds, of members of the aristocracy of his country now acting as counter-jumpers, ay, and even as cabmen, though in these extreme cases it almost always turned out, on inquiry, that the individual, the fallen noble, was a hopeless *mauvais sujet*.

'I warn you,' he said, 'that as to dinner, though I hope you will be pleased when it comes, you may have to wait a good quarter of an hour, at least, for your soup, or *minestra*, as we say.'

‘Well, I would any day rather wait for my dinner than that my dinner should wait for me,’ observed Basil.

‘Amen!’ from the silent captain.

‘And is this the whole establishment?’ went on Basil. ‘Rather a limited space I should say to drive a profitable trade.’

‘The business goes on all day more or less. From half-past eight in the morning till ten at night you will seldom find the place empty, and at certain hours, from eleven till one, for instance, and at the late dinner hour, as at present, it is often crowded. But there is another room upstairs, which, as we want to while away the time, and are on investigation bent, we may as well go and look at.’

Truly it was not worth the visit. A shabbier little room it would be difficult to find; yet two of its narrow tables were occupied, and the ladies of the party, if not fashionable, were evidently respectable, and all of the Italian nationality.

‘Tell me,’ said Basil, as they went down again, ‘what is the meaning of that inscription hung on the wall?’

'Oh,' laughed the signore, '*Libera è lo sfogo*. I am not surprised you cannot translate it. It is a common inscription enough in the second-rate *trattorie* of my country though, and means that no one is to take offence at any outburst on the part of the other customer, either on the score of noise, indignation, or swearing—in deference, be it understood, to the excitable nature of Italians.'

'Then *sfogo* means outburst?'

'Idiomatically yes, but literally it means exhalation or emanation.'

By this time the salmon, Bologna sausage, anchovies, etc., were on the table, as also a sort of *Julienne* soup, with an extra strong flavour of meat, liberally dotted with vegetables, and Belsospiro insisted on their adding to it a large spoonful of grated Parmesan cheese. Then came sole *au gratin*, which all voted a great success. They drank a red wine called *Chianti*, which is something between a Bordeaux and a Burgundy, of a singularly bright ruby colour, and clean and racy to the palate. It was brought up in *fiaschi*, as they call the octagon-shaped

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colourless glass bottles or flasks, in which it is imported in an upright position and with no end of trouble, although a tastefully arranged straw work protects in a great degree their delicate thinness. But no corks are ever used, indeed the fragile necks would not bear the pressure; a small quantity of sweet oil is poured on the top of the wine to keep it from the air, and this is again surmounted by a tuft of cotton wool, probably for the mere sake of preserving the contents from dust. It need hardly be stated that wine thus bottled is not intended to be kept very long. After the fish arrived an *entrée* of duck with tomatos, and then came one of the specialties of the place, a dish of '*Spaghetti à la Milanese*.'

'I say Bel,' Basil would sometimes address his friend by that abbreviation, 'I've no doubt that funny-looking mess is most excellent, but how the deuce do you eat it?'

'You see me, and so learn what you might never invent,' and the signor proceeded first to help his two *convives* and himself, and then to give ocular demonstration

of the art of consuming *Spagghetti*, which is a fine and imperforate kind of macaroni, like a true Milanese ; first running his fork into a heap and then turning it round and round until a convenient amount was twisted from the rest.

But even with a past master before one's eyes, it is not so easy to do this neatly at first, and our trio had a good laugh during the lesson. Do what they would the tyros were always having what the Italian called telegraph wires from their mouths to their plates.

'What are we to drink now?' asked Denis, 'this stuff makes me uncommonly thirsty. Some more *Chianti*?'

'Not so,' said their guide, 'for you have much to taste. Here Manrizzio,'—this to the waiter in the vernacular, 'let's have a bottle of *Inferno*.'

'That sounds hot and strong,' said Denis.

'You shall find him cool enough still,' replied the signor. 'After this we'll have the *Vattelina*, and finish up with just one bottle of sparkling *vino d'Asti* with the sweets.'

The next item in the repast was calvé's head



*à la vinaigrette* excellently done, and then came *un risotto*, but only that the Englishmen might be introduced to that celebrated Italian preparation of rice, for Belsospiro told them that it was never eaten at the same meal as macaroni, they having too great a resemblance with each other, being dressed with much the same ingredients, and found to be of too satisfying a nature to appear in one *menu*. Next appeared some plain slices of roast beef from the file, in case the Englishmen should not have made out a dinner on odds and ends. They both declined to touch the meat, though it was evidently done to a turn; but they helped themselves to the salad by which it was accompanied, and which they both enjoyed, all redolent as it was of garlic, and plainly as they could detect the sugar it contained. Then they attacked the sweets, the first of which was more of a cake than a sweet proper, and claimed a Genoese origin; the second was orange fritters broiling hot, which gratefully prepared the way for the Neapolitan ices, which constituted the entire dessert.

With all these they imbibed the light and sparkling *Asti* with great gusto. This wine, too, is not good when kept, and is, moreover, a weakly traveller, so that whenever a bottle refused to go 'pop,' it was carried off untasted and uncharged for.

The conversation that went on between the three acquaintances during this repast might easily have earned for them the reputation of gourmets, had it not been that, in two cases at least, the dinner at Arrigo Abbrugnido's had the excuse of novelty. In time, however, the last glass of *Asti* was drunk, and the account having been called for and settled, they began to talk of where they should go next. An English opera company was playing at Her Majesty's, it not being yet sufficiently advanced in the season for the arrival of foreign artistes.

Guiseppe had the *entrée*, and thought that as the business the troupe was doing was not the very best, he could without difficulty pass in his two companions.

To make their exit they passed several little tables, at which members of Italian Bohemia were enjoying their prandial re-

pasts. Sitting at one nearest the door there were two men, foreigners like the rest, but bearing evidence in their persons of a far higher social position than others of the throng. To Guiseppe Belsospiro they were evidently strangers, for as he walked by the first of the trio he passed without noticing them. Not so Captain Denis, who followed him, for, as he approached the table, he gave a sort of involuntary start or shudder, and one of the men, jumping up, grasped him by the hand.

‘Arnold, mon cher Arnold,’ he cried, in the same rapid Italian-French Guiseppe was wont to use. ‘What a happy chance that I should meet you in this great crowded city.’

Denis drew his hand back for a second, as though his first impulse was to deny the acquaintance. A second thought, however, suggested that this were well-nigh impossible, considering that, during a stay of some months in Italy, this man had been one of his most frequent associates. He accepted the recognition then with as much

warmth as he could conveniently assume, and making room for Basil to pass him and join Guiseppe at the door, he took the fatal step of whispering a few confidential words. No man is wise at all times, and the spirit of intelligence was scarcely smiling on Captain Denis when he stood there with Guiseppe Belsospiro's bright eyes fixed keenly on him, as he whispered those few hurried sentences,—

‘Delighted to see you, my dear Monico. Your old English friend in all but name. I have dropped Arnold for property come to me from an aunt. In England I am known as Denis.’

‘Denis?’ repeated the other. ‘It is difficult to give a new name to the same face. To me you will always be Arnold, mon cher Arnold.’

‘Impossible; the name has brought me nothing but ill luck. I have discarded it for ever. In fact, I have almost forgotten that I was ever called by it.’

‘Ah, ché,’ exclaimed the Italian. ‘Bizarre, there is no doubt you English are bizarre.’

‘Bizarre or not as you like, only remember

in the future I am Denis. I'll look in here to-morrow or the next evening, in the hopes of finding you. My friends are waiting for me now.'

Henry Denis' usually unsympathetic features were darkened by a scowl when he joined the others at the door, and Guiseppe's large dark eyes looked like two pregnant questions.





## CHAPTER XII.

ARNOLD *ALIAS* DENIS.



THE silence with which the three men pursued their way from Abbrugnido's restaurant to Great Portland Street, and thence into Oxford Street, was somewhat moody. Each mind was agitated by conflicting thoughts, bearing upon their joint affairs for the most part, yet travelling through an individual and secret vein. The sentences which occasionally fell from their lips were pointless and vague, mere words pronounced, because common courtesy demanded an attempt at conversation.

Giuseppe was the first to utter anything that had a real meaning, inasmuch as, arrived at the corner of Oxford Street, he

suddenly made a change in the evening's programme, by remembering with a start that it was impossible for him to accompany them to the opera, since he must give a lesson to a youth, engaged in business all day, and whose very existence till that moment he had quite forgotten. His dear friends need not however be disappointed on that account, since he would write them a line on the fly-leaf of his pocketbook, which, if they presented it to his well-beloved M. Mayer, would at once obtain for them seats in the theatre.

He accordingly stopped under a lamp-post and wrote a short note.

'It was provoking,' he said, 'very provoking. If he could manage to join them later he would,' and after making many voluble speeches, in that very incomprehensible lingo between French and Italian in which he was in the habit of expressing himself, he sped off towards the Regent Circus, leaving the others to get into a hansom.

Arrived at the corner of Regent Street he turned up northwards, doubled back

along the next street, and in less than five minutes was once more at the door of Arrigo Abbrugnido's restaurant. The civil landlord was standing there sniffing the evening breezes, and filling his lungs with some fresh air, of which there was a very limited quantity inside.

He gave a little exclamation of astonishment on seeing Guiseppe Belsospiro return so soon, and then they began a conversation in glib Italian, which lasted for a few minutes, the result of which was that Abbrugnido threw open the glass-door leading into the restaurant as he was in the act of saying,—

‘He is a worthy man, and a respectable citizen. I knew him years ago, before I deserted the beloved land.’

Apparently the individual to whom he referred was the man who had addressed Captain Denis as ‘Arnold,’ for Abbrugnido walked straight up to him, and presented Guiseppe in proper form. Then he called for a bottle of his own *Asti*, and invited the two men to drink with him. Signor Velucci, so the stranger was called,



was delighted beyond expression to make Guiseppe Belsospiro's acquaintance; the latter, owing to his prestige as a singer, being regarded as a little god by an admiring coterie of compatriots, and his fame having reached in no diluted form the ears of this same Velucci, who belonged himself to the artistic world being a *genre* painter of no mean reputation. The mutual greeting then was effusive, almost affectionate. A northern climate had evidently infused none of its coldness into the ardent temperaments of these southern sons, and they gushed over each other with a joyous spontaneity which was gladdening to behold. They wandered for a while together in that fair realm of imagination which a love of art made entrancing for both of them, and where the songster and the painter can walk hand in hand; then perhaps seeing by the expression of Abbrugnido's face that, though accustomed to the vagaries of artists, he could scarcely follow them in so high a flight, they descended once more to matters more in accordance with everyday life. They had formed a good

*Si, si, si*, for months, and *entre nous*, signor my compatriot I do not think that this same M. Arnold is as pleased to see me in England as one might expect.'

'Perhaps you know something about him which he is afraid of your repeating.'

'Holy Virgin! you are not far wrong. He left Naples under somewhat suspicious circumstances, the truth about which I can, however, not tell you, partly because I do not know, and partly because I should be tongue tied if I did.'

'A woman?' asked the little singer, his keen eyes flashing and his fat body swaying about from side to side as he grew more and more excited.

'I do not deny altogether that Arnold had his amourettes; but the escapade to which I refer had nothing to do with petticoats. There is, perhaps you are aware, a society in Naples called "*La mano destra*," a purely local affair, and from whose councils politics and religious discussions are alike excluded. Practically it is an attempt—now of some years' standing—to engraft freemasonry as practised in England upon Italian soil. For

any apparent reason, it is hard to say why it should be a secret society at all, since it certainly makes no secret of what is its chief, and I have good reason to believe, its only aim—the furthering of judiciously applied charity to both private and public ends. Lay visiting the sick, and the abolition of what has hitherto been such a reproach to our poor country, the swarms of professional beggars ; of those idle rascals who, by their lying and sham piety, divert the course of true charity from its legitimate channels, and by their unblushing persecutions, harden the hearts of all almsgivers, save the most stupid, careless, and superstitious, against the very name of that poverty whose self-elected representatives they have the insolence to call themselves. But to our subject. Of this same “*La mano destra*” Arnold was made treasurer.’

‘Treasurer! this Englishman? Charity and credulity are closely akin since these public benefactors choose a man of whom they know nothing for their treasurer.’

‘You would not have chosen him, Signor Guiseppe?’

‘I!—*Corpo di Bacco!* No. It requires a man with a clear brow and an honest expression of face to be chosen as the guardian of public moneys.’

‘And you do not see these good qualities inscribed on the physiognomy of M. Arnold. You are right. Yet all members of your family had not your perspicacity.’

‘How—what—who—go on Signor Velucci,’ ejaculated Guiseppe, talking very fast.

‘This Inglese was introduced to the “*La mano destra*” by Signor Battista Belsospiro, the miller at Veccia. He is—’

‘My brother. Battista is as simple-minded as this Englishman is double-faced. Povero Battista.’

‘Signor Battista is a worthy member of “*la società segreta*,” which, strange to relate, reckons but few nobles among its members. Unshackled reform is a stride on the road to progress which usually emanates from the middle classes.’

‘*Basta!*’ cried Guiseppe, to whom ‘*La mano destra*’ from its political side was uninteresting. ‘The finale, the sequel of this story, give it to me quick.’

‘When I left Naples, Arnold was in the full swing of success, and everyone was congratulating himself that an Englishman, being from his nationality a good accountant, had undertaken the financial arrangement.’

‘*Chut!* Then he was successful,’ interrupted Guiseppe.

‘You did not expect it. You are right. I had not been in Florence six months before I received a letter from a dear friend, informing me that this same Arnold was suspected not merely of incapability, but of embezzlement.’

Two or three rapid oaths hissed furiously through Guiseppe’s thick moustache, but they seemed to be produced more from satisfaction than anger. He was mentally gloating over the conviction that he had trapped his foe.

‘And afterwards—what happened afterwards?’ he asked excitedly, since Velucci did not proceed with his narrative, but sat staring at him in a sort of wonderment. The good fellowship existing in the genial nature of the sunny artist was somewhat wounded by the evident satisfaction with

which Guiseppe regarded the shortcomings of a man with whom not an hour ago he had dined on intimate and friendly terms.

‘I can relate no more,’ he said rather disappointedly. ‘I prefaced my story by telling you I was ignorant of details. That there have been many difficulties I feel very sure, and since Arnold is in London, it is evident that he is no longer treasurer to “*La mano destra*.”’

‘You do not know if he married in Italy?’

‘Married? Scarcely. Arnold is, I should think, essentially a bachelor.’

Guiseppe gave a sort of grunt when, with seeming irrelevance, he asked,—

‘Have you heard that my brother Battista has lost his only daughter?’

‘La Bettina? Never! The prettiest girl Veccia. I made the loveliest sketch of her crossing the stream close to her father’s mill with a basket of clothes on her head. *La Bettina morte—ah chè—ah chè*—so young, so fair—and you and I, Signor Guiseppe, are left to struggle along an uphill road for indefinite years. It is strange—very strange!’

Guiseppe did not answer him, but sat with his elbows on the table, his face hidden in his little fat hands, through the fingers of which the tears might be seen quietly trickling. They were the first he had shed over Bettina's death, and perhaps now they were rather the result of excitement than of actual sorrow.

It was well that his overflowing sensibility could thus give itself vent in tears, for in this instance they were safer than words. Signor Velucci knew naught of Arnold's supposed share in the home tragedy. He must be told nothing. At all events not till Basil Armfield had been warned against Captain Denis, and some farther steps had been taken towards the recovery of Lady George Heriot's boy. Thus pondered Guiseppe as he sat with his head bowed on his hands on the table, not even heeding Velucci's inquiry as to the manner of poor Bettina's death. It was only when he repeated it a second time that Guiseppe started up.

'The doctors would probably give you a learned name for her disease,' he said, 'but

a poet would call it fading away. Povera Bettina, may her sweet spirit rest in peace !'

'Amen !' responded the other fervently ; and though they both of them avowedly belonged to what is called the progressive party, yet they crossed themselves under the influence of a strong impression, perhaps from early habit, and Guiseppe rose to take his departure. He bade his new acquaintance an *empresé* farewell, and having exchanged addresses and many promises to meet often, Guiseppe found himself once more in the street, and alone. Then only did he allow tenderness to give place to wrath, his eye kindled with strange fire, he clenched his little chubby hands with unwonted determination, and mentally pronounced '*vendetta*' on the dastardly Englishman. Not *vendetta* as it is usually understood in the sense of a life for a life, obtained at any cost by secret assassination or open fight. But that vengeance would come home most strikingly and vindictively to the Englishman by a public revelation of all his sins and delinquencies during a tolerably heavily-charged



career. This was what Guiseppe promised himself as he walked away briskly from Abbrugnido's door, and went down to Her Majesty's Theatre to have another look at his victim. By the time he reached the entrance the last strains of the opera were being sung, and M. Mayer smiled at the fact of his little Italian friend presenting himself for admission at so late an hour. There was something in Guiseppe's face, however, that told him he was in no mood to endure banter, so he simply explained that his friends were on the grand tier and let him pass in. He met them coming down the stairs, and it was well perhaps that he was not doomed to undergo a long ordeal of Captain Denis' society, for the sight of him was almost more than his resolution could endure. He longed to seize him by the throat and dash the miserable life out of his graceless body. Of his reiterated thanks for the pleasant evening Guiseppe's courtesy had afforded him, the Italian took no notice, but turning to Basil, who saw that there was something amiss, he said,—

‘I thought you would wait for me, *mon*

*enfant*, so I am here. Shall we walk back together ?'

'With pleasure.'

They parted with Denis at the corner of Piccadilly—he was going to his club ; and the two friends turned towards Regent Street. For a second Guiseppe looked back at the captain as he disappeared in the gloom. Then he said in thick, almost guttural accents,—

'Engage a detective to-morrow to watch that man, and you will sooner or later find the son of your friend.'

'Denis ! What makes you think so ; what have you heard ?'

Guiseppe gave him the gleanings about Denis that he had received from Signor Velucci, but not a word did he utter about his own personal belief in Denis' utter baseness. Had he not promised Venetia that he would not mention this subject to her brother, and he was too honourable to break his word, even though rapidly succeeding events served to throw new lights on their progress.

Basil Armfield did not at first seem as

impressed as Guiseppe could have wished him to be with the belief that, because Denis was a money defaulter, he might also for that reason have had a hand in carrying off little Dandy. It was difficult to Basil to accuse a man, whom he met in society on equal terms, of felony, but Guiseppe was so positive that to have this clue unfollowed would be to forego all chance of finding the child, that Basil at last decided to adopt his advice, only stipulating that the greatest secrecy should be observed, both for the sake of advancing the cause and to prevent Denis' susceptibilities from being wounded if he should prove innocent. A scruple at which Guiseppe laughed mockingly, though he agreed to observe it. For the little Italian some of Basil's nice points were occasionally drawn so finely that he could not perceive them.

So long had been the discussion, so pregnant was it with interest to them both, that one o'clock struck before they parted at the door of Basil's abode in Cobbold Place.





## CHAPTER XIII.

MR GREEN.

**B**RANCH PLACE is not the most aristocratic or even genteel street in London, still some of the houses have very worthy occupants. A plate on the door of one of these signifies that it is inhabited by a Mr James Green, and that the calling he pursues in life is that of a detective. As he sits writing a letter in his little front parlour, he would seem to a casual observer a rather insignificant individual. He is very short in stature, white-faced and quite clean shaven, with nothing especially remarkable about his features, except a pair of keen dark eyes, which seem to take in at a glance the length and breadth of all surrounding objects. But Mr

James Green, though he can be glib-tongued enough when he likes, is as a rule reticent of speech, and seldom vouchsafes to enlighten another mind as to the observations his shrewdness enables him to make.

In daily life he is very quiet, almost morose in his movements, and few among his personal friends, though they know he is quoted as a very clever detective, and that he is making large sums of money in his profession, have any idea how many disguises he can assume, or with what clever mimicry he can suit his actions or his voice to represent the individual he elects to personate.

A large chest of drawers in his room, of which he never allows any one but himself to keep the key, is full of numberless disguises, and no one knows better than James Green how different shaped whiskers and beards and moustaches, properly adjusted, change in a few seconds the entire outward bearing of a man.

He has been out all night following up an intricate and delicate affair, about which he is writing a summary to the patron who

has employed him, when there is a loud ring at the door-bell, and a masculine voice is heard inquiring whether Mr James Green is within.

Business is never sent away from No. 10 Branch Place, and the stranger—for he is a stranger—is admitted to the presence of that important functionary. He takes his seat opposite the desk at which Mr Green is sitting and proceeds to state his requirements, prefacing all details by an inquiry as to whether strict secrecy will be observed anent all names and identities. A short, almost rude, affirmative is the indignant detective's answer; and the stranger, merely bowing his head in recognition of his belief in the man's assertion, states simply in a few brief sentences that his name is Basil Armfield, that he lives in Cobbold Place, and that he has come there in reference to the disappearance of the only child of Lady George Heriot.

Here Mr Green interrupts him by an exclamation.

‘Interesting case! very interesting case! A brother detective, Mr Bowen, has been working it, I think.’

‘For Lady George — yes ; and so far, unsuccessfully.’

‘I am to understand then that I am employed by you ?’

‘Exactly. Lady George is not aware that I have called on you ; nor do I wish her to know it unless we should be successful in our inquiries. A new light has been thrown on the subject, which, I fancy, no one but myself and one other has seen.’

Mr Green smiled ; he was so accustomed to what he called ‘amateur lights.’

Basil, however, did not notice it but went on.

‘You have been spoken of as the first detective in London, to you therefore, Mr Green, I have come in the hope that, working on the material I am about to provide, we shall be able before long to unearth this hapless little boy. I believe your terms are very high. Perhaps I ought to preface my story by telling you that I, personally, cannot afford to put down much money, but that if you find the boy, Lady George’s liberality will be boundless.’

‘Have the goodness to proceed with details,’ said Green, discarding his pen for the first time. ‘The money arrangements I make always depend greatly on the success or non-success I see before me at starting.’

Basil Armfield began the narration from the very beginning. Green, meanwhile, did not seem to pay any very great attention, but turned over the papers before him as though he were looking for something. At last he fixed his eyes full on Basil.

‘You have, I think, yourself been accused of having a hand in the disappearance of this child?’

‘Only malevolently by the nurse, who was discharged for losing him. No one else credits the tale.’

‘You are a great friend of Lady George? A lover, in fact?’

‘Who dares make such an assertion, and what business is it of any one?’

‘My dear sir. Pardon my seeming indiscretion, but in a matter of this nature every small detail has a bearing on a greater one. Is there no one besides the



nurse who is likely to have a spite against you—from jealousy perhaps? Because it is very certain that you are one of the people marked “suspected” in this business.’

‘The man whom I especially want you to watch may—’

‘Captain Denis?’ replied the detective, with an aptitude that made Basil start with astonishment.

‘You know all about the case.’

‘I know enough to assure you that if the case were mine, Captain Denis is the individual in connection with it that I should watch.’

‘Exactly; then your light is mine, though it is only from some matters that came to my knowledge last evening that I have arrived at this conclusion.’

‘And they are?’

Basil gave the information Velucci had bestowed on Guiseppe Belsospiro, as the latter had related it to him.

‘Important—very important,’ remarked Green, ‘though not exactly bearing on this case. Yet as materially damaging the character of this Denis, decidedly import-

ant. Do you know where Captain Denis lives ?'

'I do not. He keeps his address a profound secret, only giving that of his club, "The European."'

'All right. The club is a starting-point.'

'Do you feel inclined to undertake the case ?'

'Recapitulate the disappearance of the child.'

Basil did as he was bid, and Green meanwhile took copious notes.

'I should like a photograph of the child,' he said, when, Basil having finished all he had to tell, the detective looked up from his paper.

Basil laid one on the table, a picturesque representation of the little fellow in a Vandyke-looking frock of velvet and point lace, with the name 'Dandy' written in the corner.

'Dandy,' said Green, 'that is well ; such a nick-name is worth pounds in a case like this. Every little booby answers to Dick and Jim and Jack ; but Dandy, by Jove ! that ought to fetch him.'

‘You will find the child if you watch Denis,’ said Basil, so decidedly that Mr Green took a long look at him.

‘Don’t you be authoritative with me, young man. I ain’t the sort of weazel that ever sleeps, and I don’t want to be taught my duty.’

Basil jumped up angrily. He regarded Mr Green’s mode of address as decidedly impertinent, and Basil did not possess the sort of temperament that brooks impertinence. Feeling, however, that if he wished to serve Lady George, which was after all his chief object just then, he must be civil to this man, he sat down again. The little movement was not lost on Mr Green, who considered that he had scored one, and as he had every intention of undertaking the case and beating his brother Bowen out of the field, it was necessary that he should have his own way, or at any rate have it to all appearance, so that, if success crowned his efforts, the honour and glory as well as the pecuniary recompense might be his.

He began a somewhat pompous speech

about not having his mode of proceeding biassed or interfered with, in which case he would see what could be done; of course he must have a little ready money, say ten pounds, to go on with, and a proper undertaking to pay at least two hundred pounds if the child was produced. Basil consented freely, and tossed him a ten-pound note to show it was a *bona fide* transaction. He knew well Lady George would pay two, nay four hundred pounds if Dandy were produced.

‘And now look here,’ said Green, ‘you must give me your honour as a gentleman, which I believe you are, that you will not say a word to any one of those suspicions we entertain of Denis.’

‘Guiseppe Belsospiro knows it—in fact he suggested it to me.’

‘A furriner; I hate furriners. They are leery and shifty. However, send him to me.’

‘Guiseppe is a good fellow. I have known him intimately for a long time. You can rely on him thoroughly—besides, he is himself quite interested in catching this Denis.’

‘Ah, yes. There is always some story mixed up with every foreigner, love and thunder stories that make the tales in all the penny journals look pale. We know how to rate them at their *juste valeur*, as the French say.’

Mr James Green spoke French fluently, and was very proud of the acquirement, though it was with an accent which made Basil Armfield smile as he rose to take his departure, believing that all had been arranged that could be entered into for the present.

It was nearly ten o'clock, the hour that he was due at his office in Whitehall, so arranging to meet Mr Green on the following day, when they should report the progress of events, he jumped into a hansom at the corner of Branch Place and went off to his work till four o'clock.

The affairs of the country, as they came before him on that particular morning in the routine of work, did not, however, engross as large a share of his attention as was quite due to them, or which they usually received from him, the fact being

that Basil Armfield was looked on as a rising man by the chiefs with whom he came in contact in Whitehall, and who gave him credit for far greater capabilities than did the world in general. To the mere superficial observer he was only a pleasant gentlemanlike young man ; but in reality he was a man capable of, but not addicted to deep thought. That sort of thought which produces most things which the thinker, when thoroughly in earnest, desires to produce. But he had never taken the trouble to dissect his own brains, and no one suspected so little what was in them as he did himself.

Oh, blessed idleness, what would become of us poor workers who lay no claim to genius, but for your lulling influence on ninety - nine hundredths of the highly gifted.

Had Basil Armfield's ability lain all in one direction, he would have been a genius, and must not only have felt it himself, but must also have manifested it by some kind of work to the world. As it was, he was only a man of exceptional latent powers, and it was the

very diffuseness and versatility of his gifts that kept them out of sight. To such a man there is no greater curse than a moderate competency, especially when it is derived from six or eight hours a-day of a drudgery in which neither zeal nor ability have any chance to shine, and which stands to the drudge in the place of intellectual work, sweetening and justifying to him the idleness of what he calls his hours of recreation, that is, his whole life out of 'the shop.' Yet though it would take an acute judge to penetrate what this young man would be capable of, were he either utterly penniless or else so rich as to have to create solid work for his own happiness; still, while few paused to record the fact, every one more or less unconsciously felt the existence of these unworked mines of merit. They told insensibly upon the expression of his face, and imparted to him that indescribable something which made acceptable from his lips even the commonest utterances. If the world in general was not proof against the charm of manner Basil Armfield almost insensibly pos-

sessed, those more intimately connected with him were of course doubly under the influence, and more than one of those who knew him well in his Whitehall office regretted to note the shadow which had of late lain athwart his life, and the gloom of which considerably deepened throughout the day after his interview with Mr Green. To a man possessing Basil Armfield's upright, honest, straightforward nature—a nature, too, highly impressionable and keenly sensitive to tell the rapid changes in society's atmosphere—this discovery that Denis was unworthy of the name of gentleman and a man of honour, almost amounted to a personal sorrow.

Most men would have dubbed him a blackguard, and consigned him in their talk to a hotter region and have done with him; but Armfield regretted, for the man's own sake and that of the class to which he belonged, that he should be capable of so transgressing the laws of honour and probity. He would not have made these feelings known to his companions, even had he not been tongue-tied on the sub-



ject, because he was quite aware that they would only have evoked laughter and derision. They weighed the more heavily on him, perhaps from the fact that he felt he must subdue, or if possible conceal them, and all through those long hours, from ten till four—for they did seem very long hours to preoccupied Basil—he looked like a man whose body was in Whitehall but whose mind was far far away. At four o'clock he would go to Lady George, that was the programme he had arranged for himself. Their meetings of late had lost all their pleasant entrain, still it was a comfort to Basil to be near her and to try and soothe some of her grief by giving her hope, which perhaps even he himself all the time deemed more or less fallacious.

While Basil is still working and dreaming by turns, the office porter brings him a letter. It is no uncommon occurrence for his letters to be addressed there, and he leaves this one, which from its superscription scarcely looks interesting, lying on the table in front of him for some minutes before he takes the trouble to open it. When he at

last takes it up listlessly and runs a penknife along the top of the envelope ; only a little bit of paper falls out, on which is writren in a very illiterate feminine hand the one word 'Denis.'

What that name is intended to convey Basil is left to discover for himself, and if it had arrived yesterday he might have found the task a difficult one ; but since his conversation with Guiseppe he naturally at once concludes that some one else besides the little Italian has reasons for suspecting the silent captain. To find Dandy is the strongest wish Basil has in life at this moment ; yet strange and paradoxical as it may seem, he cannot get rid of the feeling that by finding him this man must be crushed and branded with the title 'social scamp.' These somewhat visionary ideas, however, do not in the least so assert themselves as to impede Basil in what he considers the performance of a duty. They merely cause him to do his duty with a regret that laying 'bare this man's iniquities should fall on him.

He put the piece of paper back in its envelope, the whole carefully in his pocket,

and then tried to go on with his work, making up his mind, however, while he sat looking at the writings in front of him that he would not wholly be guided by Mr Green's directions, but that very cautiously and discreetly he would warn Lady George against allowing herself to be in the least imposed on by the blandishments of this same Denis.





## CHAPTER XIV.

### WHAT TIDINGS?

**L**ADY GEORGE is walking up and down the pretty ground-floor dining-room in Chapel Street. It would be almost impossible to reckon the number of miles she has wandered up and down that room since Dandy disappeared. To sit still seems impossible, and she is afraid to go out, lest during her absence the news should come that he is found. Every ring at the door-bell startles her—every time she hears the sound of a strange voice she puts her head out of the door to learn if the visitor has brought any tidings. Never before was fond mother so distracted by suspense, and the terrible wondering whether there was not still some

other and better course left which had as yet been untried. In fact the events of the last few days had so changed Lady George, that even her brother-in-law and most intimate friends failed to recognise her. Not externally, her face had simply become a little paler, her features grown somewhat sharper ; it was in character that she seemed to be so strangely altered. The quiet, reposeful, almost inert Lady George had at once, by the stroke of adversity, been transformed into a fidgety, peevish, irritable woman whom it required but a little contradiction to render downright ill-tempered, almost violent. In these moods Basil alone could have soothed ; but then Basil was not always there, and there was not one member of the household but longed for little Dandy's return, if not out of interest and attachment to the child, because they felt the peace and comfort of the house would be considerably increased by his return.

Lady George's maid, from being more with her mistress, suffers cruelly, and as she considers most unjustly, since she was absent with Lady George when the event happened,

and therefore could in no way be blamed, even indirectly. She has just, however, received a most severe reprimand for daring to stand talking in the street to Mrs White, the dismissed nurse, a fact which Bowen the detective has revealed to her ladyship, the only piece of information in truth which he has succeeded in bringing her, and which after all bore but little relevancy to the case, causing only the stress of Lady George's anger to descend on the hapless Abigail, who was actuated by no other motive than that of a sheer love of gossip.

Lady George is still marching briskly up and down the room, thus letting off as it were some of the superfluous steam which misery has so rapidly created in her temperament, when at the sound of the visitor's bell she stops suddenly and glances at the clock on the mantel-shelf. 'Not Basil, it is too soon; only ten minutes to four. Perhaps some importunate visitor.' She did not say 'not at home,' on the contrary the butler has orders to admit every one, since even the most unlikely individual may perhaps be able to throw some light on the whereabouts of her absent Dandy.

‘Captain Denis.’

Lady George rushes up to him with extended hands.

‘Have you brought me any tidings?’

He shakes his head with a sigh, as though overcome by his sympathy for her he cannot trust himself to speak. She turns away from him with a little irritable stamp, as much as to ask why he has come there if not to give her tidings of Dandy.

Captain Denis does not, however, pretend to notice it, but sits down in an arm-chair near the fire with a sort of ‘Master-of-the-house’ manner, which at any other time Lady George would have resented to the fullest. He produces from his pocket a long blue envelope containing official-looking documents, which he unfolds and begins to look over with some care. Lady George, after two or three turns, stops in front of him and looks at him inquiringly. They have already been together for four or five minutes, yet no conversation has been attempted. But then Denis is a man of few words, and Lady George is too preoccupied to talk.

‘Have the papers anything to do with

Dandy?' she asks, however, after she has looked at him, and then at them for a second or two.

'Directly—well, no, not exactly.'

'Then, why have you brought them here now?'

'Business, my dear Lady George, must be attended to. I have brought them for you to sign.'

'Oh, I can't look at papers now. They are about transferring that money, I suppose? What do I care about money! Money is of no use to me without my darling Dandy.'

Perhaps this was the state of feeling which Captain Denis had anticipated,—at all events, her words did not have the effect of making him huddle his papers up and put them out of sight; on the contrary, he pushed his chair round to the writing-table and laid the documents in order before him, saying very quietly as he did so,—

'Even in the deepest grief, from which I am sorry to know that you are suffering now, it is surely possible just to sign your name, which is all I want you to do.'

'I hate signing my name unless I read the



papers,—you know that quite well,' she said shortly; 'and I do not feel inclined to devote my mind to these horrid law formularies now. Take them away, do, and bring them at some more convenient time.'

'Lady George, it is imperative that these papers should be signed without delay. You need not read them; surely you can trust me that they are correct?'

She looked at him for a minute, then she said,—

'A week ago I did not know the meaning of the word mistrust, but since my Dandy has been taken away I have no faith in any one.'

Captain Denis fixed his little keen eyes on her as though searching for a hidden meaning in her words, then he looked down once more on his papers, as he observed,—

'Poor Dandy's disappearance is indeed to be doubly regretted, if it makes you doubt your best friends.'

'Who are my best friends?' Lady George queried half of herself.

'Surely those whose chief object in life is to serve you to the utmost.'

‘I do not believe in unselfish devotion : every one has a personal reason when they do a kind action.’

‘Oh, Lady George, what a very small view to take of humanity !’

‘It is the correct one, however,’ she answered tartly ; ‘at least so I am beginning to discover.’

‘And you think my object in serving you is—’

‘I know quite well what your object is, Captain Denis, and it is a waste of time to repeat it now, since it will *never* be accomplished.’

He looked at her under his dark eyelashes for a second with a very evil glance, in which anger, jealousy, revenge held no mean place. Then he asked rather pointedly,—

‘And Mr Basil Armfield,—he is one of your devoted friends,—what is his object ?’

She grew crimson from the roots of her brown hair to the edge of the well-fitting linen collar that encircled her fair throat.

‘Mr Basil Armfield is so young,’ she said hesitatingly, as though searching in her mind for an answer, ‘his objects and aims are scarcely developed.’

‘Indeed. Yet it strikes me, Lady George, that when the day arrives for his objects to be fully developed, he will ask you to be his wife.’

‘Silence, Henry Denis,’ she cried, growing almost dramatic in her excitement. ‘I will hear no talk of marriage till Dandy is found. Basil would not dare—’

‘So, then, we have discovered the object of this young favourite. When he has found Dandy he is to be allowed to pay his court to your ladyship,’ and Captain Denis’ voice was loud and sneering. ‘If he is not successful, I wonder will he fall from favour?’

‘Enough, Captain Denis; for mercy’s sake, leave Basil Armfield’s kindly efforts alone. I do not think he has any desire but to serve me.’

‘Which he shall never do if I can help it,’ muttered Denis to himself behind his moustache, but she did not hear it. She had taken to walking up and down the room again in order to recover composure, if possible. After a turn or two she held out her hand for the papers.

‘Let me look at them,’ she said; ‘a little

attention to business may perhaps divert my thoughts from the dreadful misery that oppresses me.'

Another ring at the visitor's bell — this time it is Basil, and though they parted last evening on the very best of terms, the two men look at each other as they meet in Lady George's boudoir with a coldness that almost amounts to animosity, while Lady George seems so nervously excited as to be quite hysterical.

It is a truly embarrassing position for each one present, as neither of the trio dares to express themselves openly, yet each one feels there are too grave issues at stake to render it wise to dissemble.

Lady George seats herself in her usual corner of the sofa and tries to force herself into reading the papers, an occasional sob, which their perusal would scarcely produce, showing every now and then how far her thoughts are from the clerkly writing on which her glance is falling.

Under other circumstances Basil, seeing that business was under discussion, would have absented himself on the first pretext

that offered, but since yesterday his opinions and ideas had undergone an important change, and he resolved to remain, and if necessary put Lady George on her guard against this cousin and trustee, who, from his double relationship—by kindred and trust—had, Basil feared, every opportunity of working her an ill if he thought fit. What rendered Basil suspicious was the finding the man there with papers at that particular time. What could they be to require such particular attention at a moment when the thought of Dandy and Dandy only was filling all their minds? His suspicions were, moreover, increased by Captain Denis' evident dislike to having them discussed before him. He even tried to take them out of Lady George's hand, saying he would come again some other time when she was less engaged. But Lady George's mood was to be whimsical and contradictory; she was as anxious now to look through the papers as she had been averse to doing so only a few minutes earlier. Probably she regarded them as a sort of neutral ground on which they could all

three meet and make observations without danger of a collision. At all events she began to read extracts from them out loud, looking up at times as though inquiring the meaning of the stiff oddly-worded law phrases. Basil meanwhile had seated himself at some little distance and was poring over a photographic album, to all appearance amusing himself while he awaited the termination of this business colloquy. In reality he did not lose one single word that was uttered on either side, and obviously understood far more of the incomprehensible law phrases than did Lady George. Perhaps Denis feared this, for he turned to him after one of her appeals for explanation and asked him if he could make the matter clear to her, it was only a necessary form for enabling him, as trustee, to transfer some property and receive certain moneys on her behalf. Basil thus addressed, raised his head from the book and shook his hair back from off his brow, giving the idea that his thoughts had been far away, and that, wholly oblivious of what was going on, he was trying to bring himself

back to the actual position of affairs. It was true he had been thinking—thinking hard whether Lady George, in signing those papers, was not giving up to Captain Denis her right to some property she had inherited from her late father, and over which the trustees under her marriage settlement had no power.

Basil was not sufficiently *au courant* with law terms to be certain of this, but the sentences she had read out decidedly seemed to imply it. He got up from the table at which he had been sitting, and in his turn began to stroll about the room, as he expressed himself incapable of giving an opinion, but suggested that the incomprehensible sentences should be read over again. This was, however, not at all what Captain Denis wished or intended should happen, and he told Lady George that since she did not seem to understand the business he would withdraw it for the present and send Mr Campion the lawyer to make it clear.'

'No, indeed,' she cried, jumping up. 'I have no doubt they are all right, and I really cannot be condemned to an interview with

that pompous Mr Campion. He is so slow of speech that he puts me in a fever. Give me a pen.'

'A piebald horse,' cried Basil, who was by this time standing by the window. 'Come, look at it first and wish,—the old wives say if you see three piebalds in a day, and wish the same thing each time you will get your wish.'

'Really, Mr Armfield, I had no idea you were superstitious.'

Nor was he ; but he had gained his point, for she went up to him at the window and looked out after the horse, while Denis meantime prepared the pen, etcetera, for the signing, and asked whether Mr Armfield would be a witness or whether he should ring for the butler.

'Oh, I am always at Lady George's service,' answered Basil, looking back from the street into the room, 'by-the-bye, I brought my mother's ring we were talking of the other day for you to look at. It is on my little finger.'

He held out his hand to her ; she looked at it in some surprise, for she remembered



no discussion about a ring, and only saw the one Basil usually wore, but on the shirt cuff she did not fail to read, though written in pencil hurriedly.

‘For God’s sake do not sign. Make what excuse you like.’

She looked up into his face—eyes into eyes, as by a flash they understood each other without a word, and Basil walked away to the writing-table where Denis was, pulling down his coat sleeve as he did so.

‘It is a curious ring, is it not ? It belonged to one of my progenitors four generations ago. Does Lady George write with a steel pen or a quill ?’

This last remark of course to Captain Denis, who, clever and far-seeing though he was, knew nothing of the little comedy that had been enacted within about five yards of him.

It was scarcely fair in Basil to throw the whole onus of the difficulty on Lady George ; still it was perhaps complimentary, since it showed that he expected her to exhibit a ready capability for getting herself disentangled from the horns of a very disagree-

able dilemma. For a second or two, however, he almost doubted whether she had understood him, or whether understanding she had thought fit to follow his advice, for she sat down in the chair by the table and took up a pen Captain Denis had laid in readiness for her. She dipped it in the ink and looked at it, then she threw it down with a jerk which spluttered the ink over the page on which she was to sign, and started up suddenly.

‘Not to-day. Oh, I cannot put my name to these deeds to-day.’

‘Not to-day; why not to-day?’ asked both the men in chorus.

She pointed to a date frame which hung over the writing-table.

‘Friday,’ she said. ‘It is against my belief to do any important act on a Friday.’

For, once at all events an old superstition had proved useful, for Lady George did not sign the suspicious law papers.

